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Wheels of Change? Impact of railways on colonial north Indian society, 1855-1920.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in History

2013

Department of History

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Aparajita Mukhopadhyay,  
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## Abstract

The thesis investigates the impact of railways on colonial north Indian society, assessing the extent to which they transformed social space and circulatory regimes. The thesis also intends to contribute to wider debates on the nature of the colonial state, and over technology as an agent of social change. Railway journeys have been assumed or claimed to have brought social change; a critical examination will re-assess these claims and assumptions.

The choice of journeys as an analytical index has been prompted by two factors: *one*, railway journeys produced novel experiences – of space and time, self, fellow-travellers, and landscape; and *two*, journeys bring people into the narrative – the Indian railway travellers.

In addition to an introduction and conclusion, three chapters deal with mechanical aspects of railway journeys such as buying tickets, and three with the purposes and experiences of travel. The need to analyse both objective and subjective factors has led to the use of a wide and diverse range of primary sources, including railway travel guides and travelogues written by Indians, mainly in Bengal and Hindi.

The thesis takes exception to the idea that Indian railway passengers did not exert any influence over railway operations but were mere recipients of decisions forced upon them. It suggests a more complex, dynamic interaction between Indian railway passengers and the railway system. The thesis also questions the rapidity and novelty of many of the changes brought by railways, but concludes that railway experiences were interpreted and analysed in ways that eventually had implications for Indian society.

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## Abbreviations

1. Bengal and North-Western Railway: BNWR.
2. Bengal Nagpur Railway: BNR.
3. East India Railway Company: EIRC.
4. Eastern Bengal Railway Company: EBRC.
5. Great Indian Peninsular Railway: GIPR.
6. Government of Bengal: GOB.
7. Government of North-Western Provinces: GNWP.
8. Government Railway Police: GRP.
9. North-Western Province: NWP.
10. Oriental and India Office Collection: OIOC.
11. Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway: O & R
12. Public Works Department: PWD
13. Sind, Punjab and Delhi Railway: SPDR.

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Aparajita Mukhopadhyay.

## *Chapter One*

### *Introduction*

Iron and steam has civilised mankind let us give India the benefit of the discovery.<sup>1</sup>

...In our own day it has been reserved as one of the most remarkable triumphs of the steam locomotive to have aroused and awakened the eastern world, to have undermined and in great measure overturned, the larger number of those deep rooted ancient prejudices which in India have so long and tenaciously resisted all previous assaults.<sup>2</sup>

The quotes above neatly encapsulate the moral and social justifications behind the introduction of railways in mid-nineteenth century India. Though railways were meant to fulfil the economic and military needs of an expanding colonial administration, their role in uplifting India from her putative stupor was considered to be equally if not more significant. This confidence in the instrumentality of railways to transform India was also part of a wider belief which credited technology with an ability to propel social change. Steam locomotion therefore was expected to perform nothing short of a social miracle for India.

Railway operations in India were formally inaugurated in April 1853, when the first train ran between Bombay to Thana, covering a distance of 21 miles (34 kilometres). In next two decades, the railway network covered 6541 route miles, and at the turn of the century India possessed the fourth largest railway system (by route length) in the world.<sup>3</sup> The development had its origin in England during the 1830s and 1840s when railway enthusiasts, investors, and the officials of the East India Company debated on the possibilities of introducing railway communication in India primarily for commercial and military purposes.<sup>4</sup> Of all proposals, two plans eventually emerged as plausible. The first plan, by R.M. Stephenson, proposed to build a railway in the Gangetic plain, between Calcutta and Delhi.<sup>5</sup> The second plan, by John Chapman, proposed railway lines from Bombay largely to tap the

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<sup>1</sup> Pamphlet addressed to the Secretary of State for India, 1853, in Home Correspondence 'B', copies of letters sent, 1849-1879, L/PWD/2/68, OIOC.

<sup>2 2</sup> G.W. MacGeorge, *Ways and Works in India: being an account of the public works in that country from the earliest times to the present day* (London, 1894).

<sup>3</sup> I. Kerr, *Building the railways of the Raj, 1850-1900* (New Delhi, 1995)

<sup>4 4</sup> R.M. Stephenson, 'Report upon the practicability and advantages of the introduction of railways into British India with the official correspondence with the Bengal Government and full statistical data respecting the existing trade upon the line connecting Calcutta with Mirzapore, Benaras, Allahabad and the North-West frontier'; 1844, London, L/PWD/2/43, OIOC.

<sup>5</sup> Idem



cotton-growing districts of western India.<sup>6</sup> Stephenson's group slowly gained the upper hand and became the East Indian Railway Company which built and operated the line along the Gangetic valley to Delhi.<sup>7</sup>

At first, the East India Company, however, was not very interested in introducing railways into India, for financial reasons. Railways in India were argued to be a risky venture and the railway promoters wanted the Company to guarantee an annual dividend to the shareholders if the railway companies did not make enough profit to pay a dividend. However, this guaranteed amount was to be paid by Indians in the form of tax to the Government of India. In other words, Indian taxpayers were to sustain railway enterprise in India, if it did not become remunerative. Soon, then, the introduction of railways found an enthusiastic patron in the person of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India (1848-1856). In a famous minute written to the Court of Directors, in April 1853, Dalhousie outlined a broad plan for railway expansion in India.<sup>8</sup> This plan remained the basis for railway expansion until the turn of the century. Apart from Dalhousie's patronage, the necessity for rapid railway expansion was also brought home by the events of the 1857. As a result, railway construction received a boost in the years following 1857, and by 1890s most important trunk lines were laid. The enormity of railway enterprise also influenced the ways in which railway administration was financed and operated. As noted already, railway promoters were interested in a guaranteed system and had their way in the initial decades of railway operations in India. Broadly speaking, railway management in India passed through three distinct stages: the guaranteed system (1853-1869), joint ventures by both private and the colonial state (1870-1879), and the modified guaranteed interest system (1880-1900).<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of railway communications was expected to convey a powerful ideological message that claimed railways would 'improve' India and bring the fruits of progress and modernity to its inhabitants. As Michael Mann argues, this was certainly a way in which the British justified their rule.<sup>10</sup> Such sentiments were also sustained by a genuine belief that scientific and technological achievements symbolised Europe's superiority and advanced civilization. The railways served as a reminder of the sources of European

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<sup>6</sup> J. Chapman, *The cotton and commerce of India considered in relation to the interest of Great Britain with remarks on railway communication in Bombay Presidency* (London, 1851) OIOC.

<sup>7</sup> J. Hurd and I. Kerr (Eds) *India's Railway History: a research handbook* (Leiden, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Lord Dalhousie's minute on the 'Railway Development in India', April 1853; in 'Correspondence regarding railway communication in India', Mf reel no. 60, National Archive of India.

<sup>9</sup> S. Settar (Ed) *Railway Construction in India*, 3 Volumes (New Delhi, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> M. Mann, 'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress: Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India', in H. Fischer-Tine and M. Mann (Eds) *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London, 2004).

dominance. In their speed and regularity, trains proclaimed European mastery of time and space and also demonstrated their capacity for precision and discipline. Railways proclaimed European dominance and the characteristics that nineteenth century thinkers believed set Western people apart from others. Since railways, more than any other technological innovation, embodied the gap in civilizational attainments between Europeans and non-Europeans, not surprisingly they also were seen as a panacea which would solve the socio-economic problems afflicting non-European societies.<sup>11</sup> As Ian Kerr notes, British authors writing for home audience located the railways within a cumulative discourse of civilizing progress. In this discourse, railways were represented as a symbol and cause, both the representative of an emerging modernity and the technological driving force of developmental change.<sup>12</sup> It was claimed that the introduction of this ‘mighty engine of improvement, would cause the slumbering spirit of India, to awake from sleep of ages, the sleep of apathy, superstition and prejudice, to knowledge of the value of time and to assume among the nations, an aspect of renovated power.’<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, a belief in the ability of steam to transform India was not confined to imperialists like Hardinge, Dalhousie or Bentinck. Karl Marx, like many of his contemporaries, argued that the railways along with the telegraph and steamships would weaken the foundations of Asiatic despotism and break down the isolation of India’s villages. This, Marx predicted, would eventually lead to higher stages of economic development which in turn would ‘dissolve’ the caste system.<sup>14</sup> Further, this belief in the transformative ability of railways was widely shared by a section of Indian society, who enthusiastically welcomed railways as an instrument of progress. R.M. Stephenson’s plan to run an ‘experimental’ railway line from Calcutta to Raniganj was supported by Debendranath Tagore, Ram Gopal Ghosh and Moti Lal Seal.<sup>15</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that this enthusiasm of the influential figures of the Bengal Renaissance for railway development reflected their uncritical acceptance of the prevalent British structure and points of reference.<sup>16</sup> But, among post-colonial scholars too, broadly speaking, there seems to be an

<sup>11</sup> M. Adas, *Machines as the measure of men: science, technology and ideologies of western dominance* (Ithaca, London, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Kerr, ‘Handbook’.

<sup>13</sup> W.P. Andrews, *Indian Railways and their probable results, with maps and appendix, containing statistics of internal and external commerce of India, by an old Indian Postmaster* (London, 1848) OIOC.

<sup>14</sup> Adas, ‘Machines’.

<sup>15</sup> Stephenson, ‘Report’.

<sup>16</sup> D. Chakrabarty, ‘The Colonial context of Bengal Renaissance: a note on early railway-thinking in Bengal’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, II, 1, March, 1974.

agreement about the transformative abilities of technology in general, and railways in particular.<sup>17</sup>

A seemingly general agreement about the benefits of steam locomotion to Indian society is one reason why railways were chosen as the focus of this project. The decision was prompted also by a related factor: the near absence of any systematic enquiry into the social experience of the introduction of railway communications. The history of transport in South Asia, as has been noted, is biased in favour of the railways and the canal system.<sup>18</sup> For the railways, however, the focus has mainly been on the economic aspects. This is not surprising because railways in India were a colonial project, and until the 1980s most scholars were investigating the ways in which they served the economic interests of metropolitan Britain. These researches highlighted the deleterious effects on Indian economy and enterprise.<sup>19</sup> Around the same time Daniel Headrick's work highlighted the role of railways as a 'tool of empire', and posed a challenge to the belief in the neutrality of technology transfer, especially in a colonial context.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, in a seminal contribution to the Indian railway history, Ian Kerr shifted the attention to a wider range of issues which included railway construction, management, and the recruitment and control of labour.<sup>21</sup> This inaugurated a new phase in the history of Indian railways. Following Kerr, scholars have ventured to explore their cultural dimensions in particular.<sup>22</sup> But they continue to accept that railways transform social space.

As Ian Kerr rightly notes, for many contemporaries and some post-colonial scholars, the negative aspects of railways (economic, military) were outweighed by their positive accomplishment – their role in creating the Indian nation.<sup>23</sup> The idea that steam locomotion benefited Indian society is surprising because (ironically) it displays a rare convergence between opinions expressed by the railway promoters or colonial officials in the mid-

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<sup>17</sup> Post-colonial is used here in a strictly chronological sense, i.e. post-1947.

<sup>18</sup> <sup>18</sup> R. Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire: circulation, 'public works' and social space in colonial Orissa* (Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2009); also N. Sinha, *Communication and Colonialism in Eastern India: Bihar, 1760s-1880s* (London, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> D. Thorner, *Investment in Empire: British railway and steam shipping enterprise in India, 1825-1849*, (Philadelphia, 1950). The literature on the impact of railway on Indian economy is extensive. For a useful overview see, I. Kerr (Ed) *Railways in Modern India* (New Delhi, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> D. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: technology and European imperialism in the nineteenth century* (New York, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> Kerr, 'Building'.

<sup>22</sup> For a collection of essays on the interactions between railway and Indian culture see, I. Kerr (Ed) *27 down: New Departures in Indian Railway Studies* (Delhi, 2007). Also, L. Bear, *Lines of the nation: Indian railway workers, bureaucracy and the intimate historical self* (New York, 2007); R. Prasad, 'Tracking Modernity: experience of railways in colonial India', (unpublished PhD dissertation UCLA, 2009); H. Bury, 'Geographies, histories, boundaries: the formation of regional cultural idiom in colonial north India' (unpublished PhD dissertation, SOAS, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Kerr, 'Handbook'.

nineteenth century, and post-colonial historians. Importantly, it also implies a consensus (otherwise denied) about the neutrality of technology, disregarding its role as a 'tool of Empire', and the colonial contexts in which it was transmitted. The convergence of opinion is surprising also because of doubts expressed in earlier times. Railways were never expected to bring instant changes. For the British, railway-induced changes had to come slowly, primarily because Indians were claimed to be slow in adapting to anything contrary to the notions of 'dustoor'.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary Indians thought similarly. On the other hand, many optimistically expected that eventually the progressive power of steam would dissolve religious, regional and caste specificities and forge a new identity. In other words, though there was a question mark on the pace of social changes in India, the transformative abilities of the railways were not doubted. Today the railways' impact may also be debated, but still their early role has seldom been questioned.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, has argued that the enthusiasm of the influential figures of the Bengal Renaissance for railway development reflected their uncritical acceptance of the prevalent British structure and points of reference.<sup>25</sup> This overlooks an important point. These figures and others like them were not merely reproducing ideas which had come down from above. They interpreted the message of railway-induced progress and western technological superiority in ways which revealed a trajectory of ideas, including acceptance of the influence and prestige of technology, but also criticism and defensiveness. Indian support for railway development was not completely derivative. By the late nineteenth-century, moreover, there was a shift in the ways in which many Indians perceived the railways. Some came to see them as an instrument of imperial control, through which Britain was draining India's wealth and resources. The mood is perhaps best conveyed by Bipan Chandra's argument that 'Indian leaders were never opposed to railways as such but to their actual mode of operation in India at that particular point of time.'<sup>26</sup>

More generally, the implication is that railways were not simply imposed on India, forcing people to travel together, and at specified times, an experience which, it was argued, would 'unfetter India from its stupor', and undermine caste and religious prejudices, albeit in some unspecified future. Rather, railways operated within a colonial context in which negotiations and even collaboration with existing social conditions were often the norm. This has to affect our assessment of their transformative impact, and our notions of the colonial

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<sup>24</sup> 'The East Indian Railway', Selections from the records of the Government of India. Papers on the proposed railway in Bengal, (1853) *Calcutta Review*, re-print, Volume 31, 1858.

<sup>25</sup> Chakrabarty, 'The colonial'.

<sup>26</sup> B. Chandra, *The rise and growth of economic nationalism in India* (New Delhi, re-print, 2004).

state. In short, as there has been a noticeable lack of critical engagement with the reception of railways by Indians, this project aims to fill the gap. It is hopefully a response to the perceptive observation of Ian Kerr, underlining the need to focus the contribution of railways to more fundamental socio-economic transformations in South Asia.<sup>27</sup> Were railways successful in bringing such changes? My thesis cannot offer a final answer to that question. Firstly, it will outline but cannot explore in detail the pre-railway history of communications in India: the main contrast is with the expectations raised about railways' social impact and the ways this has been assumed. Secondly, the thesis cannot assess and compare all the forces for social change in colonial India. Instead, it will offer a nuanced understanding of the Indian experience of a radically new system of transport, and of the responses to its introduction. It will re-examine contemporary reactions to demonstrate their complexity, which must be part of any overall assessment. It aims also to add to our understanding of the nature of colonial state in India, and of the question of 'colonial modernity'.<sup>28</sup>

In this thesis, the railways will be regarded as a transformed social space and circulatory regime; one of the concerns will be changes in the practices and purposes of journeys. The reference to social space has been influenced by Henri Lefebvre's idea that roads, railways and other forms of infrastructure are materialisations of social relations in space. Here social space is defined as 'a social product ... The space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action .... In addition to being a means of production, it is also a means of control and hence of domination, of power'.<sup>29</sup> The circulatory regime is understood as the totality of circulations occurring in a given society, and their outcomes.<sup>30</sup> Since circulation has a long history in South Asia, a focus on circulatory regimes is expected to offer a long-term perspective to appraise the impact of railways.

Railways intensified the scale, speed, and the degree of the circulation of goods, people and ideas. This project, however, focuses primarily on people and ideas within the railway arena or reflecting upon it. One way of considering the changes will be through journeys - the most visible symbol of circulation, and therefore a convenient index of analysis. Moreover, in circulating, things, humans, and notions often transform themselves,

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<sup>27</sup> Kerr, 'Handbook'.

<sup>28</sup> <sup>28</sup> Here, 'colonial modernity' covers the spatial (India) as well as the temporal (as experienced during colonial rule) aspects. See D. Menon, 'Religion and Colonial Modernity: rethinking belief and identity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37, 17, 2002. Also, D. Arnold, *Science, technology and medicine in colonial India*, The New Cambridge History of India, III.5 (Cambridge, 2000); chapter four.

<sup>29</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Circulation implies not just simple mobility, but a double movement of going forth and coming back, which can be repeated indefinitely. See, C. Markovits, J. Pouchepadass and S. Subrahmanyam (Eds) *Society and Circulation: mobile people and itinerant culture in South Asia* (Delhi, 2002).

and in turn shape society.<sup>31</sup> As Wolfgang Schivelbusch's pioneering work has shown, railway journeys produced novel experiences – of space and time, self, fellow-travellers, and landscape.<sup>32</sup> These experiences were interpreted in ways which had social implications. This thesis aims to identify these aspects in the Indian context. For examining social space, I have borrowed the conceptual framework developed by Ravi Ahuja in his work on colonial Orissa, though his focus is mainly economic and mine mainly social. He approaches the 'problem' of social space in a sequence of seven hypotheses, juxtaposing them against common colonial conceptualisations of space. These are: production, conflict, historicity, relativity, compression, disparity and rhythm.<sup>33</sup> Of these, the hypotheses of production, conflict, relativity, and compression and disparity will be used in the thesis. The following paragraphs offer a thumbnail sketch of how these four hypotheses will be applied in this project.

The hypothesis 'production' underlines the conditions in which social space is historically produced and reproduced. This idea draws attention to the persistent claims of the railway promoters and colonial officials that India was a blank that had to be filled or 'opened'. Roads, railways, and canals were widely expected to create new kinds of space, and were deliberately engineered to do so. This image, though incorrect, fulfilled two significant purposes: *one*, it provided the necessary justifications to introduce large scale projects aimed to build transport infrastructure. And *two*, it conveniently overlooked the existence of earlier networks of transport and the social space and spatial practices engendered by these networks. But railway operations did not produce a social space out of vacuum. If anything, the production and reproduction of social space took place within earlier produced spaces, and responded to the demands and challenges presented by pre-existing practices. The spatial practices created out of this interaction had both new and continuing elements. The subsequent chapters of this thesis will show how the demands of a radically new system of transport produced a new travel discipline, which shaped social space, and spatial practices through both interaction and opposition to the pre-existing forms.

Conflict, the second hypothesis, refers to the contested processes of production and reproduction of social space in which different social groups unevenly participate. The contestation leads to the creation of spatial practices which are not uniform, and represents the conflict through which social space was produced. In my project, the social space and spatial practices spawned by railway operations reveal conflicts, challenges as well as

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<sup>31</sup> Idem

<sup>32</sup> W. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the industrialization of time and space in the 19<sup>th</sup> century* (California, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Ahuja, 'Pathways'.

appropriation by those who produced and reproduced this space. This process is most evident in the ways in which the railway network, and the social space produced by it came to be appropriated by diverse groups for a variety of reasons which were often contradictory. For instance, the appropriation of the railway network by the nationalist leaders was primarily ideological. But the network was also appropriated in more practical ways by railway passengers (including a large number of pilgrims), railway employees and even criminals, many of whom plied their trade exclusively on railways. Such conflict and contestation are evident in the day-to-day functioning and management of railways which were shaped by the demands made by Indian railway passengers and the response of the railway authorities. The negotiation and unevenness characteristic of this interaction between passengers and the railway authorities also underline the conflict through which social space and spatial practices were produced.

The third hypothesis 'relativity' refers to the idea that while the socialisation of natural space is at once precondition and result of all historical forms of social practice, a tendency towards relative space acquires predominance only after the advent of industrial capitalism. In other words, the growth and expansion of capitalism led to increasing abstraction of space. In the context of Indian railway this process is evident in the patchy growth of the network. The initial direction of the growth of railway lines in India followed Lord Dalhousie's suggestions as outlined in his famous minute on railway construction in India. The emphasis on 'trunk routes' by Dalhousie primarily covered strategic areas. This policy proved inadequate to integrate local markets, compete with alternate means of transport, and attract passenger traffic. But a significant outcome of this uneven distribution of railway lines was the growth of an idea of a hierarchy of regions structured by their access to railways. This hierarchy and its governing principles were instrumental in ascribing social, political or economic roles to specific regions, and continue to influence ideas of spatial reorganisation to this day. They created a standardised grid within which people circulated. The thesis analyses the impact of this circulatory regime on passengers.

Related to the idea of spatial hierarchy is the next hypothesis 'compression', which can be defined as a radical reconfiguration of social space by way of a transformation of the relative distances between its locations. Ahuja argues that the compression of relative distance between locations leads to social homogenisation. The introduction of railways certainly reduced relative distances between locations and enabled faster travelling. It also led to imagining territories in ways hitherto not possible. All these had a significant bearing on conceptualisations of territory in colonial India. It was now possible to 'see' the country

either by travelling by trains or by reading travel accounts. But while it cannot be denied that quicker movement facilitated the imagination of territory, this thesis will question how far it led to homogenisation of space.

The hypothesis of ‘disparity’ has a critical role in examining the nature and impact of railways on social space in colonial India. Here, ‘disparity’ can be broadly defined as differentiation of space when annihilation of relative distance between certain places occurs at the cost of others. Railways have often been credited with introducing disparity. However, it is important to consider elements of continuity and not to exaggerate the transformative powers of railways. In this thesis, a comparison will be between the material conditions in specific regions before and after the railways, to appraise the impact of railway. On the other hand, attention will be paid to the disparities that railway travel either introduced or allowed to be expressed, sometimes in new ways. The thesis will assess the importance of primarily economic as well as social, cultural, and political distinctions that were experienced on the railways.

These four concepts will be used to assess transformations in the patterns of circulation, and circulatory regimes. Particular attention will be paid to mapping changes in the practices and purposes of journeys. One concern will be the practices of physical transport, and the related mechanical aspects such as buying tickets, consulting timetables, and using the platforms and waiting rooms. By considering purposes, we will address the subjective elements of travel. The increase in the number of people travelling together was accompanied by the necessity to travel under conditions which were at once more intimate and impersonal. The rules of railway travel were very different, the necessary physical proximity and communication with other travellers and railway employees were unprecedented. For instance, to buy tickets passengers had to communicate with the ticket booking clerks and had to make their way through crowded ticket counters – all this was definitely new and a necessary part of railway travel. Travelling became more impersonal, by which I mean the possibility of travelling with strangers as also the inviolable rules of travel (at least in theory) which were administered through railway employees who had no rapport with the passengers. Passengers had to learn to follow train schedules and had to adapt to new sites like the railway stations, waiting rooms, platforms, and railway carriages. Journeys therefore did produce new social spaces and spatial practices and transform existing ones. They produced novel experiences. These experiences were interpreted in ways which had social implications. The interpretations bring the Indian railway travellers into the narrative.



### Scope and sources:

The thesis covers around six decades from c.1855 to c.1920, a period in which the railways have not received much scholarly attention. These dates reflect two significant points in their history in India. In August 1855 the first trains ran from Calcutta to Raniganj thus inaugurating the 'railway age' in Eastern and Northern India; and 1920 is a convenient end point to ascertain the degree of change attributable to railways alone and to contextualise these changes within a wider socio-political framework. The territorial focus is the Indo-Gangetic plain and Bengal, though comparisons with other areas will be made from time to time. The area between Calcutta to Delhi, being strategically important for the colonial administration, received the earliest unbroken railway communication. This choice has also been influenced by the availability of primary and secondary material in Bengali and Hindi, two major languages of the region, and my familiarity with them, which enabled me to consult these sources. This geographic focus also limits the analysis to those private railway companies (unless specified as state managed) which operated in this region. These are: the East Indian Railway Company (EIRC), the Eastern Bengal Railway (EBR), the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway (O & R), the Sindh, Punjab and Delhi Railway (SPDR), and the Bengal and North-Western railway (BNWR).<sup>34</sup>

The source material for this project has been affected by the need to combine objective (practices) and subjective (purposes) analysis. In addition to the standard archival resources for colonial Indian railway history, I have also looked into hitherto unused sources.<sup>35</sup> These include the correspondence between the agents of the railway companies based in India and their Board of Directors in London. But, crucially, use has been made of guidebooks – railway travel guides and tourist pamphlets – and of travelogues written by Indians mainly in Bengal and Hindi.<sup>36</sup> The decision to use guidebooks and travelogues has

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<sup>34</sup> Hereafter these acronyms would be used.

<sup>35</sup> By standard archival resources I mean the records of the Public Works Department and the Railway Records. For a detailed list of sources see bibliography. I claim this source as hitherto unused because I have not come across any reference to the use of these correspondences in any secondary literature on the Indian railway. The railway companies whose correspondence has been consulted include the EIR, the EBR, the Oudh and Rohilkhand, the Indian Midland Railway and a series called 'Railway letters miscellaneous' which contained letters from several railway companies on diverse issues. For details see L/PWD/2 series, OIOC.

<sup>36</sup> This choice too has been dictated by my familiarity with both languages though a use has also been made of the English translation of a Marathi travelogue and few travelogues written originally in English. The Bengali and the Hindi texts have been looked at by Kumkum Chatterji and Harriett Bury respectively, but this is the first time that an attempt has been made to use them together and this has the vantage of not only covering a wider area, but more importantly, offering a comparative survey of regional railway experiences. For a comprehensive list of travelogues used see either bibliography or J.F. Blumhardt [Ed] *Catalogue of Bengali printed books in the library of the British Museum*, 1886, OIOC and The catalogues of the Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushtu printed books in the library of the British Museum, 1893, OIOC. Also, K. Chatterjee, 'Discovering

been influenced by Benedict Anderson's ideas about the links between print language, public sphere and the growth of national consciousness.<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to establish the authorship of the guidebooks. Their information was gleaned from a wide range of sources including military route books, gazetteers, travel accounts by Europeans, and even mythologies and local histories. Interestingly, despite being gathered from such eclectic sources, the contents of the guidebooks reveal a common literary and aesthetic sensibility, with specific political and social overtones. The authors of the travelogues are easier to identify, including public figures such as Akshay Kumar Dutta, Bharatendu Harishchandra, Navinchandra Sen, Balkrishna Bhatt or Surendranath Ray.<sup>38</sup> They belonged to the professional middle-class of clerks, lawyers, doctors, journalists and so on, were invariably high-caste, and had received varying degrees of Western education.

An appraisal of these two kinds of source reveals that they were intended to convey wider messages than merely descriptive accounts of sites and travels. This was possibly because these texts, especially the travelogues, were written by people who certainly used them as a medium to articulate their social, political, and economic ideas. Interestingly, the travelogues' authors were also influenced by the sensibilities of the guidebooks – an aspect which has remained hitherto unexplored. The social position and aspirations of these authors certainly affected the tone and content of their travel narratives. In the context of mid-nineteenth century India, as Vasudha Dalmia argues, they sought a common social ethos and were aware of the political potential of the solidarity which could be forged.<sup>39</sup> Their ideas and views were articulated not just as individuals, but as members of a wider collective identity, and in order to claim a representational position for themselves vis-à-vis the colonial state. But this expression of collective identity did not preclude the possibility of asserting their identities in opposition to other social groups. In other words, if at one level these authors wrote about their railway travel experiences as Indians, at another level they interpreted railway encounters as Bengalis, Hindustanis, Hindus or Muslims.

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India: travel, history and identity in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India', in D. Ali [Ed] *Invoking the past: the uses of history in South Asia* (London, 1999) and Bury, 'Geographies'.

<sup>37</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (re-print, London, New York, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Akshay Kumar Dutta was a leading member of the Brahmo Samaj and the first editor of the Brahmo journal *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, Bharatendu is often called as the 'father of modern Hindi', and was a prominent playwright, journalist and polemicist, Navinchandra Sen was a well-known Bengali poet, Balkrishna Bhatt was the editor of the Hindi magazine *Hindi Pradip*, and Surendranath Roy a leading journalist.

<sup>39</sup> V. Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and nineteenth-century Banaras* (New Delhi, 1999).

The use of two distinct kinds of sources: the official and the un-official, has permitted an analysis of the objective and the subjective aspects of journeys, and they have complemented yet interrogated each other. They have also helped to present a fuller picture of the ways in which Indian railway passengers encountered and interacted with a new technology of transport. The travelogues represent Indian voices that have been almost wholly missing in the prevailing historical narratives of the Indian railways. They are a major source for descriptions of railway practices. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the travelogues for assessing the social impact of railways. Firstly, though written in vernacular, and therefore catering to a wider audience, these texts were written by a specific social group (urban, literate, upper-caste/class) for a target audience more or less in the same social position as the authors. As such, the notions and sentiments expressed in these texts had a specific socio-economic resonance. Secondly, most of the travelogues used in this project are in Bengali, and therefore represent singular regional response. The claim to glean an ‘Indian response’ based on primarily though not exclusively Bengali sources can be (quite rightly) problematic. Finally, these authors constituted a minority of railway travellers. Therefore, their railway experiences do not tell us directly about those of the majority of travellers.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that, being written in the vernaculars, the travelogues reached a wider audience, directly or indirectly. It is not without significance that the authors, who often self-published their travel accounts, also kept the prices of these texts low, or in some extreme cases distributed them free.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it cannot be argued that elite voices had no wider influence. On the contrary, the timing of these texts is instructive. Most of these travelogues were written from the late-nineteenth to the early twentieth century and are of course symbolic of the growth of the book printing industry in colonial India. But they also represent a wider shift which characterised the twentieth century – the changing relation between different social groups, print language, public sphere and the growth of mass mobilisation largely around issues of identity. The content of these travelogues, it can be argued, was shaping attitudes and framing ideas which were influential. They created a filter for experiencing railways in specific ways and it can be fairly assumed that they established the frame or the context in which railway experience was interpreted. It is not without significance that the authors of these texts hinted at the difficulties faced by those who

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<sup>40</sup> Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri and Ghosthabihari Dhar, authors of ‘Bharat Bhraman’ and ‘Tirtha Yatra Vivaran’ respectively, distributed their travelogues free, because they wanted people who could not afford to buy books could read these accounts and benefit from them. The link between travel and ‘benefit’ would be explored in chapter five.

travelled in lower class carriages and linked the conditions of travel to a wider political narrative about the colonial context of railway operations in India. They were clearly taking upon themselves the role to represent those sections of the society who presumably lacked such devices. The authors of these travelogues were using a relatively new found medium, both textual and technological, to self-fashion a position between the colonial state (claiming paternal beneficence) and the majority of Indians. In other words, these texts were producing and re-producing social norms (in this case how to interpret railway experience) through hegemony.<sup>41</sup>

Why then should the travelogues have had an impact beyond their immediate audience? Firstly, a sense of novelty added to the significance of the experiences of ‘ordinary’ travellers, which were formed by objective conditions, but also by prevailing ideas. Some of the majority’s impressions will have been shaped by circumstances that we find described in the travelogues, and may well have been influenced by the ideas expressed in those accounts. Secondly, knowledge and images of train-travel spread well beyond those who had experienced it. It is true that until the end of the nineteenth century railways were relatively limited in their location and impact; many Indians were too poor to pay for their own travel by train, or lived far from a railway connection, both geographically and considering the difficulties of local travel.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the railways affected an unprecedentedly large number of people from a wide cross-section of society. As Ian Kerr notes, by the turn of the century for an increasing number of people railways was a palpable part of everyday life – a first-hand experience through railway travel, daily encounters with tracks or passing trains, and newspaper stories about aspects of railway experience which affected most people.<sup>43</sup> As chapters two, three and four will demonstrate, timetables, availability of tickets, crowding, speed of the trains, and crime affected all railway travellers. Ideas and sentiments about territory, identity and nationhood possibly influenced those whose railway experiences were interpreted through other filters such as an access to a particular kind of education or membership of a specific social group. But to claim that railway

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<sup>41</sup> A. Gramsci, *Selections from the prison books* (London, re-print, 1982).

<sup>42</sup> The current historiography about infrastructure and transport projects in colonial India claims that till the turn of the twentieth century railways faced formidable opposition from other means of transport primarily boats, carts and caravans, and that railway’s impact has been unduly magnified. See, Ahuja, ‘Pathways’, Sinha, ‘Communication’, and the forthcoming title by Clive Dewey about steamboats on the Indus, which raises concerns about impact of technology of transport in colonial South Asia. I thank Professor Peter Robb in bringing this work to my notice, and I also thank Clive Dewey for sharing his unpublished manuscript. See C. Dewey (forthcoming) *Steam boats on the Indus: the limits of western technological superiority in South Asia* (New Delhi, OUP).

<sup>43</sup> Kerr, ‘Handbook’.

encounters, especially conditions of railway travel (proximity, confinement, and travel discipline) did not influence the experiences and sensibilities of ‘ordinary’ travellers would be to ignore even the possibility of non-elite response to a radically new mode of transport. It is also to ignore the fact that the ‘lessons’ drawn by elites from the railways would later spread very widely in the popular imagination. This is not to claim that the ideas expressed in the travelogues represent the experience of all Indian railway travellers. Neither is it a plea to generalise from these texts. Rather, as the ongoing discussion suggests, it is to argue that, even if railways did not do much, directly, for many people till a certain period, yet their physical presence and ideas about them may have had a wide impact.

The use of Bengali travelogues requires explanation. This choice has been influenced by the fact that around the late-nineteenth century more travelogues were written in Bengali than in Hindi. This predominance of Bengali texts undoubtedly lends an uneven texture to my narrative, and illustrates a specific regional response. This phenomenon, however, was part of a wider change in which Bengalis were travelling and settling down (often permanently) in different parts of India primarily for reasons of employment.<sup>44</sup> Among other things, this mobility had its origin in the willingness with which Bengalis took to English education and made themselves employable for colonial service. By the late-nineteenth century there was a Bengali diaspora scattered all over India and the travelogues reflect this well. In other words, the Bengali travelogues highlight the formation and expansion of this diaspora as an evidence of specific qualities and characteristics which made Bengalis appropriate candidates to hold positions of responsibility even in places far away from their homes.<sup>45</sup> In most cases, the authors of these travelogues enjoyed the hospitality of members of this diaspora and, as chapter seven will illustrate, such experiences were interpreted to reach broader conclusions about civilisational attainments of Bengalis and non-Bengalis. Evidently, such experiences were eased by the introduction of the railways which enabled easier movement. At one level, therefore, these texts had to be used with caution and the strident claims for Bengali superiority had to put in a wider context of experiencing (first-hand) a sense of dispersed Bengalihood. But, on other hand, such sentiments also bring out the ways in which Indians (in this case Bengalis) were using a new experience, railway travel, to reconfigure notions of identity and in the process challenging the colonial stereotype. More importantly, railway travel also provided occasions when the Bengali authors of these texts went beyond their

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<sup>44</sup> G.M. Das, *Banger Bahire Bangali* (Calcutta, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1915) OIOC.

<sup>45</sup> The qualifications included knowledge of English, trust reposed by the British officials as well as Bengalis’ putative ‘civility’ as opposed to ‘uncivilised’ behaviour of non-Bengalis.

regional identity and created wider linkages as Indians. These texts therefore, when read with the wider context in mind and alongside the Hindi travelogues, offer a useful source to complement official narrative of Indian responses to railways.

The use of a diverse range of sources reveals the Indian responses to railways, and, last but not least, allows a re-assessment of Indian agency. This is a unique aspect of the project, and marks a departure from the dominant scholarship. Indian railway passengers have hitherto remained on the periphery of the Indian railways' grand narrative.<sup>46</sup> In the standard historical works, 'native' passengers appear only as a collective, almost as a homogenous group lacking any differentiation as well as agency. Despite their numerical strength, this insignificance of Indian railway passengers has traditionally been explained as symbolic of their unequal status in a railway system operating within a colonial context. This view, though not entirely inaccurate, overlooks substantial evidence which points to the importance of 'native' passengers for railway operations in colonial India. This project takes exception to the argument that Indian railway passengers did not exert any influence over railway operations and were mere recipients of ideas and decisions forced upon them. The day-to-day administration of railway operations in colonial India was more complex than has been hitherto argued. The Indian railway passengers were alert and aware of their diversity. More importantly, they were conscious of their importance to the railway economics, and did not hesitate to assert their demands based on either their social or economic identities.<sup>47</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that the railway authorities recognised the diversity of 'native' passengers, and used it to formulate policies which were expected to have appeal to specific groups. For instance, in 1864 the EIRC introduced intermediate class carriages for 'respectable natives', and these became instantly popular with the target group. Very soon however the 'respectable' patrons of these carriages came to resent any intrusion from third class travellers arguing, as a distinct socio-economic category, that they should therefore enjoy their journey in comfort. They claimed that, since they had paid for better facilities, they were within their rights not to allow anyone in the carriages who could not afford an intermediate class ticket. Interestingly, though not surprisingly, the railway authorities agreed with this logic. They even took largely unsuccessful measures to prevent forced entry of third class ticket holders into the intermediate class carriages. And when passengers travelling on

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<sup>46</sup> This is surprising as they constituted 97% of the coaching traffic. See the Annual Railway Reports submitted to Secretary of State for India, Parliamentary Papers, V/4 series, OIOC.

<sup>47</sup> Till the turn of the twentieth century, railway enterprise in India remained financially unremunerative and the coaching traffic supplied the much needed profit, and Indian passengers constituted 97 per cent of the total passenger traffic. See, 'Annual Railway Reports', OIOC.

the lines of other railway companies demanded introduction of intermediate class carriages citing similar reasons, their wishes too were granted.<sup>48</sup> It is not surprising that the EIRC authorities did not find these demands unreasonable, because status or class was an important operative factor in the railway administration. On many occasions it was argued to be more important than race. This vital aspect of railway administration in colonial India has been largely overlooked. This project will underline its significance, because it shaped the social space and spatial practices introduced by railways, and also played a crucial role in the ways in which travel experiences were interpreted. This was not an isolated incident of ‘native’ passengers exerting agency while underlining their internal differentiation. In several cases Indian railway passengers successfully deployed their social, economic or numerical significance as a bargaining tool.

The agency of ‘native passengers’ was also evident when on some occasions Indian passengers refused the advantage of the speedier and relatively comfortable travel offered by the railways. Mostly their grounds were inefficient service and the unaffordable price of tickets. Sometimes passengers informed the railway authorities beforehand and urged them to amend policies which rankled. At times, the railway authorities were left to guess at the reasons for a lack of passenger traffic and falling margins of profit. Such refusals usually had the intended impact, and the railway authorities were forced to make changes to suit passenger demands, and even at times abandoned unpopular measures altogether. The bargaining for better facilities and refusal to use railway services imply a more complex encounter between Indian railway passengers and the railway administration than previously believed. They suggest negotiation not a lack of agency. In addition, they underline the oft-neglected aspect – the role of social differentiation in shaping railway operations in colonial India.<sup>49</sup> This is not to deny the importance of race, but to argue that it may be inadequate to explain the complex interactions between Indians and the railway system.

This picture of Indian railway passengers as an articulate and differentiated group responding diversely to railway policies also challenges the conventional treatment of railway policies as a monolithic set of rules which were imposed uniformly across India. As noted already, railway administration in India passed through several stages of private as well as state control. But the impact of these frequent changes upon railway policies has remained

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<sup>48</sup> See chapter two for details.

<sup>49</sup> This idea is somewhat similar to David Cannadine’s argument, though I think ideas of both race and status were influential shaping colonial relations and therefore one needs closer scrutiny of specific cases rather than an overall explanation. See D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

unnoticed.<sup>50</sup> Broadly speaking, till the establishment of the Railway Board in 1905 one can hardly talk in terms of an uniform all-India railway policy governing railway operations across the country. Given this, railway policies were not only diverse but they were also kept loose, often deliberately, to allow for contingencies and to take care of the demands of the localities through which the railway lines passed. Local conditions played a very important role in shaping railway policies – the railway companies as well as the government were keen to develop traffic and as a result paid close attention to the local requirements. This attention to local requirements was most evident on questions of separate carriages for women passengers and introduction of platform tickets.<sup>51</sup> And here too, the ground rule for formulating policies remained an awareness and acknowledgement of the diversity of ‘native’ passengers; their significance to railway economics and the need to find a balance between earning profit and catering to specific passenger demands.<sup>52</sup>

Railway policies were also susceptible to alternations especially when customers took a fancy to some specific policies on a particular line and demanded similar facilities on their own lines. For instance, the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company employed women guards to double as ticket inspectors for Indian women passengers. This policy, not surprisingly, became very popular, and demands were made to implement similar measures across other railway managements. At times, however, contrary impulses also influenced railway policies and in such cases measures which were found to be unpopular with the local public were either not introduced or were rejected. Thus it is evident that railway policies more often than not were motivated by financial concerns, and on many occasions a discrepancy between pecuniary needs, the exigencies of day-to-day operations, and an over-arching administrative rhetoric can be noticed.<sup>53</sup> Most importantly for this thesis, the complex interaction of passengers and railway management indicates ways in which railway experiences were interpreted, which in turn influenced the transformation of social space, and had implications for Indian society. This interaction also provides occasions to evaluate the nature of colonial state.

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<sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the different stages the railway management in India passes through see S. Settar (Eds) *Railway Construction in India*, 3 Volumes (New Delhi, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> For a detailed discussion see chapters two and three.

<sup>52</sup> As chapter 3 will show the balance was often hard to find as it was difficult to cater to all sorts of demands and continue to operate profitably

<sup>53</sup> This inconsistency too, is not surprising and is perhaps part of a wider picture of colonial relations in India (as in elsewhere) and one needs to be cautious while applying administrative generalisations as causal explanations.



## **Chapter Scheme:**

The thesis is divided into two sections containing three chapters each. The first section deals with issues related to the practices of journeys, while the second is about the nature and purposes of journeys and their implications.

### *Section I*

Chapter two is primarily concerned with the impact of the introduction of railways on ways in which people travelled: the new practices of travel, and the modification of existing ones. The focus is on railway timetables and tickets. This choice has been dictated by two factors: one, the timetables and tickets were the most visible changes in the practices of journeys, and thus require attention. And two, arguably, these were to impose a discipline on Indians which was to influence their behaviour beyond railway travel. Interestingly, these claims made by the railway promoters in the mid-nineteenth century have been accepted by later commentators, and railway operations have been credited with imposing a time-discipline in colonial India. This chapter will interrogate the ability of timetables and tickets to transform the ways in which people travelled. More importantly, it will enquire to what extent the travel discipline imposed by railways contributed to time-discipline, and what were its social implications.

Chapter three continues with the broader theme of practices of journeys. It is about the sites which were either introduced or modified by the railway operations, and where travel discipline and practices of journeys came to be located. These include: the railway stations, the platforms, the waiting, and the refreshment rooms, the ticket booking counters, and the railway carriages. The decision to focus on these sites has been influenced by their role in bringing and keeping people together, which facilitated interaction. More importantly, being social spaces produced out of the specific circulatory regime imposed by railways, these sites are convenient units to examine the hypothesis of conflict outlined above. These were the arenas where Indian railway passengers experienced the following: encounters with each other in hitherto unimagined proximity, the demands of a new technology of travel, and last but not least the presence of the colonial state. The experiences produced on these sites offer vital clues to appraise Indians' experience of railway travel. This chapter enquires into the ways in which Indian travellers responded to these sites, the evolution of these social spaces, largely as a result of these responses, and their impact.

Chapter four, concluding the first section, brings together the interaction between the practices and the sites of railway travel by exploring crime in transit. This chapter explores the ways in which railway operations engendered specific forms of crime against passengers. Crime can be argued to reflect contestation of social spaces. It therefore allows the analysis of the production of social space, and the processes through which these were transformed. As noted already, railways did not produce social space in vacuum. The social spaces they created either overlapped, or conflicted with pre-existing social spaces. And crimes against passengers were a key indicator of these conflicting processes. Moreover, crimes illustrate conflicts between diverse social groups, and their putative rights. Therefore, by applying the hypotheses of production, conflict, and historicity, this chapter will appraise the impact of railway crime on Indian society. In addition, a focus on crime, and passengers' perceptions of it, will help to evaluate the claim made by the railway promoters, and the colonial state, that railway travel discipline was symbolic of the wider order imposed on Indian society by Pax Britannica.

## *Section II*

Chapter five examines the role of railways in transforming the nature, and purposes of journeys in colonial India. It also appraises the implications of these changes on colonial India. Railways transformed existing circulatory regimes (pilgrimage, employment), and introduced new ones (daily commuting, travel for leisure). They evidently altered the rhythms of circulation. But hitherto no attempt has been made to examine the extent, and degree of this transformation. The speed, and relative reliability, and comfort offered by railways not only changed the way people travelled, but why they travelled. Travelling acquired different meanings, and people came to travel for specific reasons, some of which were also products of the colonial encounter. The chapter analyses this crucial transformation by a critical survey of railway guidebooks, travel guides and tourist pamphlets. Further, these texts are compared with the travelogues written by Indian railway travellers. The comparison illustrates the ways in which these distinct though not opposing sources shaped perceptions of travel.

Chapter six examines the proposition that railways created a 'national' space in India. Arguably, this was achieved both by a physical and imaginary process of homogenisation which deprived regions of their characteristics, and imbued them with wider, trans-local identities. This chapter departs from this dominant scholarship by contesting the creation, and completeness of 'national' space, and the role of railways in it. For analytical convenience,

‘national’ space has been divided into two distinct units: the socio-political and the economic; the former primarily representing conceptualisations of territory, and the latter the actual physical space through which humans and commodities moved. The creation of socio-political ‘national’ space is examined by a critical analysis of the travelogues written by Indian railway travellers. These texts bring out the role of railways in conceptualising territory in colonial India. But they also offer vital clues to question this conceptualisation as either ‘national’ or homogenous. They also illustrate the contestations over the production of space by offering multiple, often contradictory conceptualisations. More importantly, they hint at the continuing significance of pre-existing notions of territory and differentiation, which indicate a more complex historical trajectory of spatial disparity. The formation of economic ‘national’ space, and railways’ role in it, is examined by comparing the material fortunes of two sets of regions. This too qualifies our understanding of both standardisation of regions under the colonial regime, and the ability of railways to create and sustain it. This chapter will also hint at the impact of these notions of territory and differentiation on colonial Indian society.

Chapter seven appraises the impact of railways on notions of identity and community. This chapter has been influenced by Schivelbusch’s analysis, but departs from it by looking at the social implications. The railway operations magnified the number of people travelling across India. The new practices of travel necessitated proximity and interactions. These experiences, and the ways they were interpreted, shaped notions of identity and community. These encounters also reflect conflicts over the social space and spatial practices. But what was the role of railways in this? Did it produce new experiences, and encounters, or was it merely a new site where older notions were assessed and re-configured? In other words, did railways contribute to the processes through which ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ were created? And more importantly, what were the constitutive elements of these categories, and what was the nature of these affiliations? Was it based on region (India/Europe, Bengal/non-Bengal), religion (Hindu/Muslim) or nationality (Indian/European)? By a critical examination of the travelogues and the Indian-language newspaper reports, this chapter will examine the ways in which accounts of railway travel expressed notions of identity and community.

Chapter eight, concluding, will bring together the themes discussed, and will reflect upon the implications of the arguments. The themes explored in the chapters are expected to meet the objectives of this project: to understand ways railways were experienced and interpreted, to show complex reactions to technology, and to demonstrate ways in which technology and railways in particular provided sites and led to interpretations that contributed

to social change. Hopefully, they will also add to our understanding of the nature of colonialism in India.

## Chapter Two

### *The practices of railway travel: timetables and tickets*

The introduction of railway in the mid-nineteenth century India transformed the ways people travelled. Fixed routes, timetables and tickets imposed a previously unknown travel discipline. By the early decades of the twentieth century, certain experiences and encounters came to be associated specifically with the railway journeys. This chapter concerns these changes, focusing on the Indo-Gangetic plain. It will also consider the response of the Indian travellers to the travel-discipline imposed by the railway travel practices. Hitherto no attempt has been made to assess the role of the Indian passengers in transforming practices of railway travel in colonial India. Most accounts convey an image in which Indian railway passengers appear as recipients of a system over which they had no control.<sup>54</sup> This however, is an incomplete picture. The modalities of railway travel impinged on the decision of the Indian passengers to choose it as the favoured mode of transport. The advantages offered by speed and relative comfort could well have been offset by the difficulties of procuring tickets, or inconvenient timings of the trains. The revenue returns of the railway companies indicate that their maximum earnings came from the coaching traffic especially from the passengers travelling in the third class and the fourth class carriages. Thus, the 'native' passengers were the backbone of the railway economy and the choices they made were crucial.<sup>55</sup> This chapter focuses on the practices of railway travel and the role of Indian passengers' responses in shaping these. It is divided into two sections, the first is on timetables and the second is about tickets. At the end, an attempt would be made to show the connections between these elements: the objective, and the mechanical changes, the influence of Indian passengers upon railway practices and policies, and the social impact of railways.

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<sup>54</sup> Goswami, 'Producing'; L. Bear, *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy and Intimate Historical Self* (New York, 2007); Prasad, 'Tracking'.

<sup>55</sup> The railway companies' dependence on the coaching traffic for revenue, featured regularly in the Annual Reports submitted to the Secretary of State for India. Passengers travelling in the lower class carriages constituted 97 per cent of coaching traffic and were the main source of income. See, 'Annual Reports submitted to the Secretary of State for India in Council', Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, OIOC.



## I

The railway timetables have been widely acknowledged as playing an instrumental role in imposing travel discipline in India.<sup>56</sup> It is argued that by introducing the idea of time, the railway timetables brought about a regulation of journeys hitherto unknown in India, and thus represent a point of departure in the existing travel practices.<sup>57</sup> Implicit in this argument are two related ideas: (a) travelling in pre-railway India was not governed by any sense of time; and (b) the railway timetables introduced a radically new practice to regulate travel. But these claims are not sustained by evidence. Travelling in India has almost always been governed by time. There were different kinds of time: religious, diurnal, seasonal. Almanacs were widely used to plan journeys at auspicious hours, and religious time played an important role in regulating movement. For instance, Bholanath Chandra, the author of a mid-nineteenth century travelogue, reminisced about how his pre-railway travels were regulated both by religious time, and the boat schedules, which must have been contingent upon seasons.<sup>58</sup> Timetables too, were not as new a concept as has been argued. Pre-railway travellers were certainly familiar with them.<sup>59</sup> The boats and the land carriages adhered to a time schedule which conformed to the climatic and local needs. In the case of land carriages time was a factor to regulate stages of journey in order to optimise the use of the horses or bullocks and to travel the maximum distance during daylight<sup>60</sup>. Similarly, boats had to adhere to a time schedule to conform to the tides, navigability, seasons and landing *ghats*. Further, the establishment of the dak-carriage transit companies in the late eighteenth century led to a formalisation of time-tables with elaborate guidelines.<sup>61</sup>

This belief in the ability of the railway timetables to impose travel discipline also rests on the assumption that the railway operations played a key role in standardising time in India, and added an element of inflexibility to travel plans. This argument, though not entirely inaccurate, overlooks two significant points: (a) the standardisation of railway time was neither quick nor linear; and (b) the inflexibility of the railway timetables was more

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<sup>56</sup> The travel discipline imposed by the railway timetables has also been identified as part of a wider process of imposition of 'time-discipline' in colonial India. See, S. Sarkar, 'Colonial times: clocks and Kali-Yuga', in S. Sarkar, *Beyond nationalist frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (New Delhi, 2002)

<sup>57</sup> This view is surprisingly close to the opinion expressed by the railway promoters and colonial officials prior to the introduction of the railways in India.

<sup>58</sup> B. Chunder *Travels of a Hindoo to various parts of Bengal and Upper India* (London, 1869).

<sup>59</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870*, (New Delhi, 2007).

<sup>60</sup> Bradshaw's Handbook to the Bengal Presidency and Western provinces of India, 1860, OIOC.

<sup>61</sup> The timetables of the dak transit companies were a regular feature in the early editions of Military Route Books of the Presidencies and the Bradshaws.

theoretical than real. It was often compromised for a variety of reasons which included passenger demands, pecuniary interests of the railway companies, and habitual unpunctuality in running trains. Initially, the railway lines in India were owned and managed by various railway companies, each having separate timetables.<sup>62</sup> The railway travellers had to follow the specific timetables of the lines by which they wished to travel.<sup>63</sup> The timetables were often published as newspaper advertisements, serving a dual role of notice and publicity for specific lines.<sup>64</sup> This arrangement worked well because the railway lines covered short distances and the train service was minimal. But as the railway network expanded, and the number of trains increased, coordination among the railway companies became imperative.<sup>65</sup> The need to regulate the movement of trains became necessary to avoid commercial squabbles and to ensure that the trains of the various companies passed through the important stations and junctions at least once during convenient hours of the day.<sup>66</sup> Improved timetables were also needed to attract passenger traffic. 'Native' passengers wanted a convenient timetable which would obviate the necessity of travelling or waiting for the trains in dark.<sup>67</sup>

It was realised that the timetables could be effectively organised only when the local times of different regions of India could be regulated.<sup>68</sup> To resolve this, the companies sought intervention from the Government of India. Among local times in India, 'Bombay time', and 'Calcutta time', were the two most important time zones. The Government of India opined that the difference of 63 minutes between these two times was too great to admit of the same 'railway time' being adopted for all of India.<sup>69</sup> It was decided that the 'Calcutta time' should be observed up the East Indian Railway network to the North-Western Provinces (hereafter NWP) so far as the limits of the local Bengal management extended; and the 'Allahabad time' should be carried up to Delhi and down the line towards Calcutta as far as the engine

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<sup>62</sup> The railway management in India passed through several stages, from private companies to government control to a system of mixed ownership and control. Initially, private guaranteed companies owned and managed the railway lines without any government control save a guarantee of 5% on their investment. See, Kerr, 'Building'.

<sup>63</sup> In a Bengali tract published in 1855, travellers are advised on the importance of accurate consultation of the timetables belonging to different railway companies. A.K. Dutta, *Bashpiya Upadesh* (Calcutta, 1855) OIOC.

<sup>64</sup> The first timetable of the East Indian Railway Company was published in 'The Friend of India' (1854), declaring the opening of the line between Howrah terminus to Raniganj. It also contained the fare structure. L/PWD/2/76, 1860, OIOC.

<sup>65</sup> Report on the administration of the North Western Provinces for the year 1863-64, V/10/20, OIOC.

<sup>66</sup> Letters of the East Indian Railway Company, L/PWD/2/78, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>67</sup> Idem.

<sup>68</sup> The train service of different regions followed the local time. The trains in western India followed 'Bombay time', while trains in Bengal and Bihar followed 'Calcutta time'.

<sup>69</sup> Report on the administration of the North Western Provinces for the year 1863-64, V/10/20, OIOC.

drivers, guards and points-men were subordinate to the local superintendent of the NWP.<sup>70</sup> It was thought best to change the time on a system of the railways whenever the working staff changed, so that the railway drivers and guards on each section would have a constant standard of time by which to regulate the performance of their duties; while the public would not suffer any inconvenience so long as the difference between the railway time and the true local time did not exceed the ordinary errors of clocks.<sup>71</sup> By 1860-1861, arrangements were completed for signaling the correct time daily to all the stations on the line from Howrah, operated by the East Indian Railway Company (hereafter EIRC ) by means of the electric telegraph; and all the station clocks were regulated by 'Calcutta time', signaled at noon every day.

Despite Government intervention and improvements in the signalling system, the railway timetables remained beleaguered by the co-existence of multiple times, and were a serious source of passenger grievance and inconvenience.<sup>72</sup> It was only by the late nineteenth century that most railway companies chose 'Madras time' for railway operations across India.<sup>73</sup> 'Madras time' was in between 'Calcutta' and 'Bombay' time, and was 32 minutes behind the former. By the late 1880s the use of 'Madras time' became the norm and the Newman's Railway Bradshaws started to publish their timetables according to 'Madras time'.<sup>74</sup> In 1905, Indian Standard Time was adopted across India, and it was decided that 'henceforth the railway operations will also be regulated by this time instead of the Madras time'.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the transition to standardised time was slow, which questions the possibility of any sudden and radical imposition of 'railway time discipline' on existing travel practices. Moreover, as noted already, the railway timetables were frequently altered, mainly to attract more passengers by offering convenient schedules. In 1865, the Director-General of the Post Office of India complained about the serious public inconvenience caused by detaining the mail trains between Calcutta and Delhi.<sup>76</sup> As a

<sup>70</sup> Idem, The Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company followed the 'Allahabad time'.

<sup>71</sup> Idem.

<sup>72</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/82, OIOC.

<sup>73</sup> There was however exception to this rule. The East Indian Railway Company which controlled the longest line of India continued to follow 'Jabalpur time' till about the late nineteenth century.

<sup>74</sup> The 1885 edition of the Newman's Railway Bradshaw shows 'Madras time' for the railway movement across India.

<sup>75</sup> 'Railway Time', Note from Secretary, Railway Board to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Public Works Department, Dated April 1905 in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/7027, 1905, OIOC. This time was exactly 5 ½ hours in advance of GMT and 9 minutes advance to the 'Madras time'.

<sup>76</sup> Proceedings of the Right Honourable Governor-General of India in Council, letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1865 from H.B. Riddell, DG Post Office of India to E.C. Bayley, Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/35, 1865, OIOC.



consequence, the population of the districts of Kanpur, Fatehgarh, Etawah and Agra were almost entirely deprived of railroad due to the untimely hours at which the single train passed through these districts. It also meant that all passengers from Calcutta had to wait from three to six hours ‘in the hottest part of the day’, at Allahabad. The timetables of these trains, it was argued, effectually prevented the development of the passenger traffic of the country, and as a result, the sum which the state had to pay to the shareholders of the EIR increased considerably. The Director General’s suggestion of altering the timetable was accepted by the EIRC.<sup>77</sup>

One of the implications of railway time is surely that it was objective rather than diurnal or seasonal in its rhythms. From the point of view of passengers, however, this was clearly not yet the case. On that basis, inconvenient railway timetables continued to draw official attention.<sup>78</sup> In 1868, the Agent of the EIRC argued that their prevalent system of two ‘mixed’ trains, one leaving Howrah in the morning, and the other in the evening, was the most economical method of working. But their timings were not suitable for the districts of Patna, Munger, and Shahabad.<sup>79</sup> These districts were populous and attracted considerable trade. The trains passed through these districts after dark, and, in spite of passing through populous tracts, they failed to attract significant passenger traffic. Further, these were the only trains through which the local third class passengers travelled, and the inconvenient timing discouraged a sizeable section of potential travellers from using the train service. On investigation, the ‘native’ passengers informed the Agent of the company that they avoided taking the trains because of the long wait in the dark as they felt insecure. The Agent of the company noted, ‘if we hope to develop the third class traffic, we should be prepared to increase facilities to induce people to travel, and must make the convenience of the people our first concern.’<sup>80</sup> These trains, he claimed, also offered ‘similar indifferent timing’, to some districts of the NWP. But in this region, the damage to the company’s finances was less because here the third class passengers had the advantage of the mail train service, denied to them in the Lower Districts of Bengal. The company’s Agent at Calcutta was keen to alter the train timings and the Board of Directors of the EIRC approved of the changes to suit passengers’ needs.<sup>81</sup> In a similar report in 1874, the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India argued, ‘the lower classes are and must be the mainstay of the passenger traffic. The

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<sup>77</sup> Idem.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Official’ means the railway companies as well as the Government of India, and the local governments.

<sup>79</sup> L/PWD/2/73, Home Correspondence, ‘B’ Series, Copies of letters sent, 1849-1879, OIOC.

<sup>80</sup> Idem.

<sup>81</sup> Idem.

Governor General in Council desires to impress upon the agency that here, as elsewhere, there can be but one result if opportunities of making tolerably rapid journeys, at low fares with comfort and at convenient hours, are given, if all restrictions as to through journeys are removed and if facilities for return journeys are afforded.’<sup>82</sup> The Railway Administration Report of 1883 noted that the through train timings could not properly serve the local passenger traffic of large cities.<sup>83</sup> The report observed:

Even turning for instance, to the latest timetable of the EIR, it will be seen that even with the present improved through service, a dealer from any station in the down direction wishing to attend the bazaar at Allahabad in the early morning, must come at midnight, 12.10 A.M, as there is no other train until 10.34 A.M. Similarly, a passenger from up direction who comes down to Patna to attend the courts or public offices, must leave at noon, 12.06 P.M., or stop until 11 o’ clock at night. Again at Aligarh, there is no train by which a dealer can come in from the up direction in the early morning to attend the bazaar, unless he comes in at midnight at 12.36 A.M and there is no train by which a passenger who has come in from the down direction to attend the courts can get away until midnight 12.50 A.M., unless he can catch No. 4 down train, which leaves at 11.07 A.M.

The report compared the revenue returns from these large ‘up-country’ cities with those areas which were served by better timetables, and frequent local trains, and argued for introducing similar measures to foster traffic.

The railway companies frequently fulfilled passenger demands for better train schedules. In 1866, in a lengthy petition to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, the inhabitants of the suburbs of Calcutta noted:

We, the inhabitants of Bally, Ootturparah and other thickly populated villages in the Howrah and Hugli districts, have been subjected to a great deal of inconvenience and annoyance from March last, on account of the alterations introduced by Mr. Batchelor, Traffic Manager of the EIRC, in the time table of the Up and Down passenger trains since the 21<sup>st</sup> of that month. From the first opening of the railway line up to the date of recent alterations, we had all along an afternoon Down train touching at the Bally station between the hours of 5 and 8.00 P.M and a morning Up train between 8.00, and 10.00 A.M. These trains had enabled us to open commercial depots and business offices, and engage in professional employments in the villages, towns and civil stations up the line, as we could then go up the morning train, transact business for the whole day and return in the evening. We need therefore hardly describe the inconvenience, trouble and expense to which we have been subjected since March last, when the Traffic Manager discontinued both these trains from our station. We have not been informed what new circumstance necessitated the above measure on the part of the traffic manager and justified him in depriving us, who were the early supporters of the railway company, of the

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<sup>82</sup> Letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> March 1874 from the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India in the PWD to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of India for Guaranteed Railways, in Home Correspondence, Copies of letters sent, 1849-1879, L/PWD/2/73, 1874, OIOC.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Administration Report on the Railways in India for 1883-84, By Colonel Stanton, V/24/3533, 1884, Simla, OIOC.

benefits of an indulgence which we have enjoyed for more than 12 years. We presume, however, that on account of the extension of the railway line in the Upper provinces, the railway time-table has been modified so as to detain the trains as little as possible at the stations in lower Bengal.<sup>84</sup>

The petitioners requested the removal of the grievance, and restoration of the older timetable. In response, the Consulting Engineer investigated the grievance, found it to be true, and ordered the traffic manager to restore the earlier train schedule. He confirmed the suspicion expressed by the petitioners that the expansion of the railway network in north India affected the timetable arrangements in Bengal. He reminded the traffic manager to not to lose sight of local interests, and to facilitate the service which might be given to the populous districts in the region.

‘Native’ passengers were aware that adjusting timetables to attract passenger traffic was important in the railway companies’ commercial calculations. As a result, they often included the need for an improved train service and increased frequency of trains in their demands for convenient timetables. The *Hindustan* of 28 May 1894 published a communication from a Brindaban correspondent who complained that since 1 April 1894, the number of trains running daily between Brindaban and Mathura had been reduced to four.<sup>85</sup> The report added that these trains were also very badly timed, one leaving Brindaban early in the morning at 5.45 and the other late in the afternoon at 5.35. The trains from Mathura too were ill-timed, one starting from Mathura at 11.30 a.m., and the other at 6.45 p.m. As a result, pilgrims arriving at Mathura at 6.15 a.m., and 4.00 p.m. had to wait till 11.30 a.m., and 6.45 p.m. respectively, if they desired to proceed to Brindaban by rail. The paper asked ‘who would be so foolish as to travel in mid-day during the hot weather’? The reduced train service, and inconvenient timing was soon apparent in the railway receipts on the Mathura-Brindaban branch line. The revenue at the Brindaban station decreased from 80 rupees to about 10 a day, and at the Mathura city station from 5 rupees to 10 or 12 *annas* a day.<sup>86</sup> An investigation into the causes of the fall in receipts showed that people preferred *ekkas* to ill-timed trains. To redress the issue, the government ordered at least six trains to be run between Brindaban and Mathura every day, timed to suit public convenience.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Train accommodation for the inhabitants of Bally’, Letter Dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1866 from Baboo Joykissen Mookerjee and others, to Captain F.S. Taylor, Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, Railway Department, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/38, ‘A’ Proceedings, 1866, OIOC.

<sup>85</sup> Earlier eight trains ran daily between the pilgrim towns of Brindaban and Mathura. ‘Hindustan’, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1894 in ‘Selections from the Native Newspaper Reports, North-Western provinces, L/R/5/71, 1894, OIOC.

<sup>86</sup> Report on the administration of North-Western provinces, V/10/157, 1893-94, OIOC; anna is a unit of currency, 16 annas make one rupee.

<sup>87</sup> *Idem*.

Demands to restore earlier timetables and train services were fairly common. As the railway network expanded, timetables were altered to incorporate new lines, and more trains. The consequent changes did not always suit the needs of the local passengers and they often wanted to revert to the more convenient schedules. The editorial of *Bangabasi* complained about the lack of train service on the Eastern Bengal State Railway (hereafter EBSR) at convenient hours for the people at Krishnagunge and other neighbouring places who worked in the Calcutta offices.<sup>88</sup> It noted that, in the absence of any early morning train service to Calcutta on Monday, people were compelled to leave their homes on Sunday in order to attend office the next day. The report demanded a restoration of the stopping of the Darjeeling Mail at Krishnagunge station to offer relief to the daily commuters. In a similar demand, an alternation in the timetable was requested to suit the needs of cultivators and dealers in vegetables who brought daily supplies to the Calcutta bazars.<sup>89</sup> The prevalent schedule necessitated a long wait at the Sealdah station till the bazars of Calcutta opened, and these people wanted to alter the train timing (at its point of origin) so as to reach Calcutta at daybreak. Restoration of earlier timetable was also demanded by traders who were ‘inconvenienced’ by the altered timing of a local train on the EIR network.<sup>90</sup> They complained that in accordance with the new timetable the train left Howrah at 8.00 in the evening instead of 8.26 and because there was no other train until 10.30 at night, they had to close their shops very early and lose business. The traders wanted the EIRC to restore the earlier time-table or to introduce a train service at 9.00 in the evening. A group of ‘holiday seekers’ too demanded a return to a convenient time-table.<sup>91</sup> They claimed that with the new timing under which the 11 up train left Howrah at 8.15 in the morning, they found it almost impossible to finish their breakfast so early as to be able to be in time for it.<sup>92</sup>

In many cases these demands were fulfilled, and the appreciation of ‘native’ passengers was evident in the revenue return. The examples suggest many factors that affected timetables. On the other hand, there is evidence that regularity too was desired. Passengers were critical of an absence of any rules on the subject of alterations of the timetables, and resented frequent changes without sufficient notice. Quick changes, it was

<sup>88</sup> ‘Bangabasi’ 7<sup>th</sup> January 1888 in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/14, 1888, OIOC.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Bangabasi’, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1889, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/15, 1889, OIOC.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Daily Hitavadi’, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1907, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/34, 1907, OIOC.

<sup>91</sup> ‘The Bengalee’, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1903, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/29, 1903, OIOC.

<sup>92</sup> Holiday seekers’ hoped that the old timing, under which the train left Howrah at 9.00 A.M., will be restored.

argued, adversely affected travel plans, and often encouraged them to choose alternate modes of transport.<sup>93</sup> A newspaper report complained about the ‘great inconvenience’ caused to people due to the frequent alternations in timetables by the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company.<sup>94</sup> It wanted the notices of changes in the timetables to be published in vernacular newspapers, and to be distributed largely among people at the railway stations. In a similar complaint, another report noted that the timetable of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company was altered once in October and again in December of the same year (1894), and pointed out that such frequent alterations without adequate publicity was a source of much inconvenience.<sup>95</sup> The traffic superintendent of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company brought to the notice of the Railway Conference the inconvenience caused to the public, and the railways, by sudden changes in timings of passenger trains. He noted: ‘if sufficient notice is not given, railways that may have to form connections with the one making changes either have to prepare a hurried and inconvenient time-table or probably make no change or miss a connection at the junction. Time-tables are not available to the public before the change is introduced and often also the different guides which are printed in various parts of India have not sufficient time to publish the change and continue to show the old timings and thus mislead the public.’<sup>96</sup> He recommended issuing of prior notices announcing impending changes in the timetables because even a slight change on any of the large main lines resulted in a total change being necessary on any line with many junctions. The suggestion was accepted to be implemented.

Although this suggests that timetables were imposing travel discipline, it must be noted that that was compromised by the habitual unpunctuality of the trains. Complaints about irregular, and unpunctual train service were common. In one particular instance, the train service on the EIRC was so consistently unpunctual that even the Viceroy on a visit to Punjab was unable to receive his mail a week after his arrival from Calcutta.<sup>97</sup> Unpunctuality of the train service had a direct bearing on its revenue. Inconvenienced passengers usually responded by opting for alternate modes of transport. Cecil Stephenson, the Deputy Agent of

<sup>93</sup> Proceedings of the Railway Conference, section on timetables, 1893, V/25/720/29, OIOC.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Azad’, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1886, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Province, L/R/5/63, 1886, OIOC.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Karnamah’, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1894 in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ North-Western provinces, L/R/5/71, 1894, OIOC.

<sup>96</sup> Proceedings of the Railway Conference, 1893, V/25/720/29, OIOC.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Unpunctual running of trains on EIR and delay in completing through booking arrangements with Delhi railway’, Telegram dated 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1869, from Colonel Strachey, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, to the Officiating Joint Secretary to the Government of Bengal, PWD in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/46, 1869, OIOC.

the EIRC admitted that 'native' passengers chose the railway for speed and time; if the railway service failed to offer either, they found other means of transit.<sup>98</sup> This observation was prompted by a serious deficit of the passenger traffic between Burdwan and Calcutta, which Stephenson attributed to the unpunctuality of the local and the through trains.<sup>99</sup> Unpunctuality remained a persistent cause of passenger grievance well into the twentieth century. In 1907, a newspaper report 'hoped that the Railway Board and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce will take steps to stop the scandalous irregularity in the timings of local trains on the EIR.'<sup>100</sup> The report urged the railway authorities to make efforts to follow timetables, and noted that the trains running behind schedule was a source of hardship especially for working men. These grievances of Indian railway passengers against unpunctuality of the trains is instructive because, they challenge both the colonial stereotype of Indians being indifferent to time and assumption that railway timetables induced time discipline in India.<sup>101</sup>

A major factor contributing to inconvenient timetables was the speed of the trains. Those trains which ran at a slower speed, followed more inconvenient timing than the faster ones; and the bulk of 'native' passengers were forced travel in slow trains because the faster ones did not have third or fourth class carriages.<sup>102</sup> Most often, they travelled in the 'mixed' trains which were a combination of lower class carriages and goods wagons.<sup>103</sup> Meant to carry only 'native' passengers, these trains usually comprised only third and fourth class carriages and rarely (if ever) any intermediate or second class carriages. Their speed was also slow compared to the mail or the express trains. On an average a 'mixed' train ran at a speed of 16-18 kilometres per hour, while the mail or the express trains ran at a speed of 20-25 kilometres per hour.<sup>104</sup> Further, the 'mixed' trains had long halts built in their schedule which made journeys longer.<sup>105</sup> Passengers travelling by these trains had to pass several days in the trains before they reached their destinations. Also, the timing of these trains was not always well-coordinated with the connecting trains for onward journeys. Saratchandra Shastri, the author of a Bengali travelogue noted the 'plight' of lower class passengers at the Bhusawal

<sup>98</sup> Note by Cecil Stephenson, Deputy Agent, EIRC, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1867, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/41, 1867, OIOC.

<sup>99</sup> Idem.

<sup>100</sup> 'Bengalee' 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1907 in 'Selections of the Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/33, 1907, OIOC.

<sup>101</sup> The word unpunctuality alone implies a sense of time, albeit transgressed.

<sup>102</sup> Though by 1871 the EIRC allowed 'native' passengers to travel by the faster Mail trains, see Proceedings of the Railway Department Government of India, P/580, OIOC.

<sup>103</sup> Home Correspondence, 'B' Series, 'Copies of letters sent', 1849-1879, L/PWD/2/73, OIOC.

<sup>104</sup> Idem.

<sup>105</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1868, OIOC.

junction where they had to wait for six hours for the next connecting train.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, a newspaper report complained that no trains ran from Burdwan to Calcutta between 8.30 a.m. and 8.30 p.m. As a result, the passengers for Calcutta who had missed the morning train had to wait at the station for several hours before they could catch the evening train.<sup>107</sup> It might seem therefore, that, whether or not railway contributed much to time discipline, they gave rise to a demand for more rapid transport. The ‘modernity’ of such expectations becomes more apparent with further scrutiny.

The railway companies claimed that the slow speed, and longer halts were suitable for ‘native needs’.<sup>108</sup> The usual explanation was ‘natives’ did not mind slower speed because they were indifferent to the number of hours spent in the trains, as long as long as they reached their destinations at a very low price.<sup>109</sup> As early as 1868, in a report submitted to the Board of Directors of the EIRC, A.M. Rendel, the Consulting Engineer of the Company recommended a system which was ‘to give the native sufficiently frequent opportunities of travelling, to make him reasonably comfortable and at the same time to increase the receipts and reduce the expenses of the railway.’<sup>110</sup> He argued, ‘third class passengers, who are chiefly natives, should not be run in the same trains with the first and the second class, who are chiefly Europeans; and the trains for the former should make longer stoppages at the stations and need not run so fast as at present.’<sup>111</sup> Moreover, a year after Rendel’s report was submitted, the EIRC’s agent in Calcutta made the following observation which is worth quoting:

We have not as yet timed or arranged the running of our third class mixed trains for the convenience or comfort of those for whose convenience they are run. There are two great wants for native travellers which we have omitted to supply and in the absence of which, not only do the natives at present travel in the greatest discomfort, but also to the great risk of their bodily health. First, the stoppage of the train every morning at day-dawn, for one whole hour to provide for the calls of nature, to which every native is accustomed at this time of day. Attached to this condition is also the necessity for native privies at the stations (noted in the margin) and for the construction of a well besides each building. It is absolutely indispensable to the native that he is enabled to use the *hookah* at this time and as our present trains are timed, there are but two stations at which this is possible and they are deficient in the necessary requirement of a well. Second, stopping of the trains every forenoon any

<sup>106</sup> S. Shastri, *Dakshinapath Bhraman* (Murshidabad, 1898).

<sup>107</sup> ‘Burdwan Sanjivani’, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1891, in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/18, OIOC.

<sup>108</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>109</sup> G. Huddleston, *The history of East Indian Railway*, (London, 1906).

<sup>110</sup> A.M. Rendel, ‘Report to the EIR on the cost and maintenance of EIR line’, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1868, in Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>111</sup> Idem.

time between 9 and 12, for one whole hour, to enable the native travellers to bathe and eat. Attached also to this condition is the necessity for baths and refreshment rooms for natives, Hindoos and Mahomedans, at the stations (noted in the margin). As a rigid Brahmin will neither eat, drink, nor pray, till he has bathed, it is evident that the accommodation offered at present compels them to break a journey, which they would otherwise continue and complete in order to get a bath; or else, to make one run, from Howrah to Jamalpur, without attending to the first calls of nature, without bathing, and without eating any food or drinking any water. It is quite clear that, in both these respects, we have altogether failed to provide the convenience absolutely indispensable for native travellers and I propose at once to re-cast the running of the slow mixed passenger trains to meet their requirements.<sup>112</sup>

The report added that it would not be difficult to accelerate or slow down these trains to reach the day-break stations as nearly as possible at the proper times, and to reach the bathing and food stations at any time between nine and twelve. These recommendations were accepted by the EIRC's Board of Directors and it was resolved that the slow passenger trains be timed to arrive at some principal station between 5 and 6.30 a.m. each day, stopping three quarters of an hour for the convenience of the passengers.<sup>113</sup> Even the Lieutenant Governors of Bengal and NWP thought the experiment was 'well worth trying', as the expenses incurred was small.<sup>114</sup>

But the 'native' passengers resented slow speed and long halts, because it contributed to inconvenient timetables. Accounting for decline in passenger traffic in 1871, the agent of the EIRC noted that as soon as third class passengers were allowed to travel by all trains, the fast mail trains became crowded with third class passengers, so much so that occasionally at roadside stations they have been left behind for want of rooms.<sup>115</sup> He thought probably the third class passengers would not have been so eager to travel by the fast mail, had it not been for the long stoppages of the slow trains at certain stations, made expressly with a view to the convenience of 'native' travellers. For Indians, the advantage of choosing railways primarily lay in its speed.<sup>116</sup> A newspaper report captured the 'native' response to the slow speed of the trains in the following words: 'while in 1865-1866 the Grand Trunk Road was almost deserted and bullock trains were no longer used, they have now again come into fashion and no few passengers content themselves with travelling on foot and all this for no other reason

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<sup>112</sup> The stations noted in the margin were: Burdwan, Sahebganj, Jamalpur, Dinapore, Buxar, Mirzapore, Allahabad, Cawnpore, Etawah, Aligarh, and Ghaziabad. Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/46, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>113</sup> Idem.

<sup>114</sup> Idem.

<sup>115</sup> Appendix to the PWD proceedings, January 1872, [EIR] in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/580, OIOC.

<sup>116</sup> 'Nur-ul-Absar', 15<sup>th</sup> August 1872, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', North-Western Provinces', L/R/5/49, 1872, OIOC.



than because they have to suffer serious losses and inconvenience in journeying by rail.’<sup>117</sup> The *Oudh Akhbar* of the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1884 expressed regret at the impending reduction of the speed of the trains of the Oudh and Rohilkhand railways to 15 miles an hour.<sup>118</sup> The paper speculated that a reduction in speed will involve serious loss to the company, and cause inconvenience to the public. It was proved right when within four months the company was forced to restore the former speed of its passenger trains. The Lieutenant Governor of the NWP approved of the restoration of the speed ‘in accordance with the public opinion’; and hoped that the inconvenience to the travelling public and the loss of trade would be compensated.<sup>119</sup> The railway companies were slow to respond to the demand for increasing the speed, and reducing the duration of halts. It was only by the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century that the speed of the passenger and ‘mixed’ trains was increased. And to an extent this also addressed the issue of inconvenient timetables.<sup>120</sup> For a long time therefore, the influence of railways in speeding up travel had been experienced more in potential than reality.

This gap in understanding the nature of the requirements of Indian passengers is ironic as the railway companies were rather eager to fulfill ‘native needs’ to attract more traffic. It also underlines the significance of Indian passengers to the railway economy, and exhibits a process of interaction, and negotiation between ‘native’ passengers, and the railway companies. It is instructive to note that the railway companies were quick to identify the issues which had the possibility of influencing passenger decisions, and made an effort to address them. Once again however, this suggests that railway impact was more apparent than real. For instance, as early as 1865, the agent of the EIRC noted the difficulties faced by passengers in comprehending the timetables which around that time were published only in English.<sup>121</sup> This naturally restricted the circulation, and use of timetables, which had a bearing on the passenger traffic. The problem was further complicated because the non-Indian railway servants were unable to help due to their lack of adequate understanding of local language; while the Indian railway employees were known to be deliberately

<sup>117</sup> Koh-i-Nur, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1871, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Provinces’, L/R/5/48, 1871, OIOC.

<sup>118</sup> The speed was to be reduced from the next month i.e. July 1884. ‘Oudh Akhbar’ 26<sup>th</sup> June 1884, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/61, 1884, OIOC.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Oudh Akhbar’, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1884, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western provinces, L/R/5/61, 1884, OIOC.

<sup>120</sup> The speed of the trains was increased due to doubling of tracks and better rolling-stock.

<sup>121</sup> Letters of the EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, OIOC.

misleading, unhelpful and unwilling.<sup>122</sup> The issue needed immediate and effective solution. Finally, it was decided to publish timetables and the tariff of tolls, rates and charges in English and also in the local language of the districts through which the lines passed. These were to be placed in some conspicuous part of the stations.<sup>123</sup> The quarterly inspection report of the EIRC (1866) noted that the order was implemented in the Upper division, but was somewhat delayed in the lower province due to difficulties in procuring Bengali type cast of a sufficient size for the purpose.<sup>124</sup> The practice of printing timetables in the local language of the area through which the line passed was imperfectly followed. While the EIRC and the EBR printed their timetables in the local language, the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company did it only occasionally.<sup>125</sup>

The Indian Railway Bill of 1868 also laid down rules for easy accessibility and ready comprehension of the timetables and tariff charts.<sup>126</sup> But these measures could only be useful for literate passengers. A sizeable section of the railway travellers were illiterate, and the relevant portions had to be read out to them. Most non-Indian railway employees were not suitable for this task.<sup>127</sup> A solution was sought in training the railway servants while 'on-job', so that daily contact with the 'natives' could offer them an opportunity to acquire the required language skills.<sup>128</sup> This measure was also expected to increase revenue which was crucial even to the Government of India, so that it was not ready to leave the matters of language in the hands of the railway companies. In 1873, the Secretary of State for India drew the Boards' attention to 'the importance of railway servants in certain positions being acquainted with native languages.'<sup>129</sup> It suggested that station masters, and assistant station masters, should possess at least a colloquial acquaintance with the vernacular of the district in which they were serving. The discussion indicates, despite these reservations, Indian passengers adapted to the practices of travel introduced by railways: a

<sup>122</sup> Idem, the allegations against Indian railway employees was not just a matter of colonial stereotype, because many travelogues also record instances of difficulty faced by lower class passengers in understanding timetables (English), and their harassment at the hands of Indian railway servants.

<sup>123</sup> Letters of the EIRC, L/PWD/2/82, OIOC.

<sup>124</sup> J. Hovendon, (Deputy Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal), 'Inspection Report of the EIR for the Second Quarter of 1866', in L/PWD/2/190, Miscellany Railway Letters, OIOC.

<sup>125</sup> A newspaper report compared the difference between the railway companies and urged the Oudh and Rohilkhand Company to follow EIRC and EBR's policies. 'Azad', 14<sup>th</sup> December 1886, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', North-Western Province, L/R/5/63, 1886, OIOC.

<sup>126</sup> 'The Indian Railway Bill', 1868, Part III, Section 31, 'time-tables', in Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/82, OIOC

<sup>127</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, OIOC.

<sup>128</sup> Idem, the railway servants were taught by the *moonshis* in the evenings, while in the day they were expected to practice their skills on 'native' passengers.

<sup>129</sup> Railway Letters and Enclosures from Bengal and India, L/PWD/3/72, 1873, OIOC.

feature which also marked their responses to the ticketing system, the focus of the next section.

This discussion shows that the social impact of railway timetables and speed was at best gradual. In practice the railways were often unreliable and slow. Time was standardised and speed was desired, as was regularity; but even so language difficulties and illiteracy reduced their immediate impact.

## II

In terms of travel practices, the railway ticket was perhaps the most novel innovation. Though the idea of payment to reach the desired destination was certainly not a new one, the railway context added new dimensions to it. By rule, the railway ticket had to be bought at the ticket-booking windows before the commencement of the journey, and its price was fixed. There was no possibility of reaching any kind of negotiated fares based on custom, or usage; nor could the fare be paid in kind. Further, the ticket had to be kept securely all along the journey, and presented for inspection at any time during the journey. Failure to do so meant harassment at the hands of the ticket-inspectors or even legal action.<sup>130</sup> For the railway companies too, tickets were the most important aspect of the railway economy. Their financial position hinged on the revenue from the coaching traffic. Elaborate rules were laid down to regulate buying, selling and inspection of tickets. Of these, the following three were most important:<sup>131</sup>

1. No passenger will be allowed to take his seat in or upon any carriage used on the railway, without having paid his fare.
2. Passengers must show their tickets to the guards when required and deliver them up to the persons authorised to receive them, before leaving the station.
3. Passengers not producing or delivering up their tickets will be required to pay the fare from the place whence the train originally started.

The earliest tickets issued by the railway companies were blank.<sup>132</sup> They were shipped from England, and the ticket booking clerks at respective stations were to write the details of fare, distance travelled and the destination on the tickets. The system could not work well because of frequent complaints from ‘native’ passengers about the irregularities practiced by the ticket booking clerks.<sup>133</sup> The Agent of the EIRC noted: ‘with regard to the issue of tickets to the third and fourth class passengers, it is impossible to be too careful to check the irregularities and extortion of venal native station-masters.’<sup>134</sup> To reduce incidence of fraud, and consequent inconvenience caused to the passengers the EIRC acquired machines capable

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Railway Bill’.

<sup>131</sup> Abstract of the Railway Bye-Laws in Bradshaw’s handbook to Bengal Presidency, 1860, OIOC.

<sup>132</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/76, OIOC.

<sup>133</sup> Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, and the travelogues record several instances of dishonesty of the ticket booking clerks.

<sup>134</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, OIOC.

of printing the journey details and the fare both in English and in the native languages.<sup>135</sup> The EBR on the other hand, issued machine-printed tickets right from the opening of the line in 1862.<sup>136</sup> But here too, the issue was the inability of the bulk of the passengers to read what was being printed on the tickets. The solution lay in devising some simple measure which would enable passengers to distinguish between various kinds of tickets. The railway companies ordered that they be manufactured in different colours. For instance, on the EIRC line, the first class tickets were white, the second class were blue, red and pink, and the third class tickets were green and yellow.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, to save passengers from being duped, the EIRC decided to put in conspicuous positions a large timetable sheet in English and native languages to enable 'native' passengers to ascertain the sum they had to pay for travel.<sup>138</sup>

The modalities of the ticket system brought the 'native' passengers and the railway authorities in close contact. For the 'native' passengers it involved an acquaintance with, and adaptation to, the various stages involved in buying and keeping the tickets for safe-keep. The buying of tickets from designated ticket windows was the first practice with which passengers had to familiarise themselves. Initially the railway companies followed a rule of selling tickets only at some of major stations. As a result, prospective travellers had to buy tickets either from the nearest principal station before commencing the journey, or by alighting at one of the important stations during the course of their journey.<sup>139</sup> But buying tickets before boarding the train was not easy. Passengers travelling by the lower class carriages had to buy them from separate ticket booking counters, and the number of windows allotted for the purpose was inadequate. Further, the ticket windows remained open for a very short duration before the train arrived, causing serious inconvenience, and chaos. Buying tickets at any intervening station was not easy either. Moreover, it entailed financial loss because by rule, if passengers did not buy tickets at their station of origin, they had to pay for the entire distance from the point of origin of the train till their destination.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Idem, these tickets known as 'Edmondson ticket', named after its inventor Thomas Edmondson of Lancaster, UK. He invented them in 1830 as a way to issue tickets more efficiently and reduce fraud in at the Newton and Carlisle Railway, UK. J. Simmons and G. Biddle (Eds) *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History: from 1603-1990s* (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>136</sup> Letter from EBRC, L.PWD/2/156, OIOC.

<sup>137</sup> Home Correspondence, 'B' Series, Copies of letters sent 1849-1879, OIOC; other companies like the EBR also followed the EIRC's example. Letter from EBRC, L.PWD/2/156, OIOC.

<sup>138</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, OIOC.

<sup>139</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, OIOC.

<sup>140</sup> 'Railway Bill'. For instance if a passenger travelling from Burdwan to Allahabad failed to buy ticket at the Burdwan station, they had to pay for the ticket from Calcutta to Allahabad (Calcutta being the point where the train started).

Indian passengers frequently complained about the ticket booking arrangements. A memorandum submitted in 1866 demanded the issuing of tickets at least half an hour before the train was due to leave, as any shorter time invariably resulted in a struggle in which richer and stronger people were more successful in obtaining tickets, leaving the weak and the poor behind.<sup>141</sup> In a similar complaint, a newspaper report noted the inconveniences of a system in which tickets were available only within a limited time.<sup>142</sup> The great rush at the booking office, the report added, gave pickpockets and thieves a favourable opportunity to ply their trade. It suggested that either the booking offices should be kept open twenty four hours, or at least their opening hours be increased. These shortcomings were corroborated by an official report submitted to the Board of the EIRC. The report highlighted the ‘universal discontent’ felt by the natives travelling by the third class at the extreme difficulty of obtaining tickets, especially at big stations like Kanpur and Jamalpur, where the struggle for tickets was ‘painful’ to witness.<sup>143</sup> Several measures were proposed to improve the situation which included opening more ticket offices, stopping the trains for an hour at Jamalpur, and keeping the ticket windows open for the entire time that the train was halted. These changes were agreed upon by the Board claiming it was ‘essential for the convenience of the third class passengers’, and the additional expenses were approved because ‘fully justified by the greater convenience afforded to the passengers of that class, which is the mainstay of the traffic.’<sup>144</sup> Similarly, in a note submitted to the Government of NWP, the Consulting Engineer of the Railway Department argued:

The duty of maintaining the rights of this class [third class passengers] falls upon the Government and it will doubtless be fulfilled, *but the loss which results from the infringement falls upon the railway company and its dimensions are shown in no returns.* It is notorious that respectable natives prefer any moderate amount of detention or delay to a very small proportion of rough usage. I would therefore beg to recommend the adoption of the following regulation that the booking officers at all terminal and principal stations shall be opened for the issue of tickets  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour before the departure of a train.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Memorandum by the Honourable V.J. Sunkersett, on the regulation for the protection of passengers by railway, in Railway Letters (Miscellany) L/PWD/2/190, 1865-67, OIOC.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Koh-I-Noor’ 7<sup>th</sup> April 1877, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, L/R/5/54, 1877, OIOC

<sup>143</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, OIOC.

<sup>144</sup> Idem

<sup>145</sup> Emphasis mine. Note by the Consulting Engineer to the Government on accommodation of railway passengers, Allahabad, 1859, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of North-Western Provinces and Oudh, P/237/26, 1859 (May-December) OIOC.

The rules regulating the opening of the ticket booking windows evolved slowly. 'Native' press and passengers suggested several measures to improve the arrangements. These included opening of out-booking counters in big cities especially during holidays and festive occasions, contracting out ticket booking to private sellers like shopkeepers and vendors in different parts of the towns, and selling tickets through post offices.<sup>146</sup> The Punjab Northern State Railway allowed the sale of railway tickets by private vendors on commission; but the practice was confined only to Rawal Pindi station.<sup>147</sup> Indian passengers welcomed this measure, and demanded the extension of similar facilities by other railway companies. This, they hoped, would also save them from the abuses and blows of the booking clerks, and the railway police.<sup>148</sup> Many passengers argued that in order to avoid this ill-treatment, many respectable persons travel by other conveyances as far as possible.<sup>149</sup> The Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company opened two out-booking offices in Benaras for the sale of tickets.<sup>150</sup> But it was not in favour of introducing the measure in other places, due to the additional expense and alleged liability to loss from fraud. But the Government of NWP recommended it to save the 'native' public from crowding and pressure around the booking offices at the railway stations. It also suggested selling of tickets from convenient places in large cities, like Post Offices, especially on occasions of fairs, festivals and holidays. By the late nineteenth century the ticket booking offices at the terminal and at most of the larger stations were kept open for the whole or greater part of day.<sup>151</sup>

The ticket booking system was also criticised for widespread fraud practised by the ticket booking clerks. As hinted already, the railway authorities were aware of the problem, but the ailment was argued to be pervasive. The railway ticket booking clerks were known to be cheats, often charging for longer distances but issuing tickets for close destinations.<sup>152</sup> Printing travel details in Indian languages did not help as most passengers were unable to

<sup>146</sup> 'Oudh Akhbar' 9<sup>th</sup> August 1870, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, North-Western Province, L/R/5/47, 1870, OIOC; Additional ticket windows were also demanded in a letter to the Secretary of Railway Conference [1888]. See 'Measures for the comfort and conveniences of lower class passengers', by the Secretary British Indian Association to the Secretary Railway Conference, Simla, 1888 in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/3632, 1890, OIOC.

<sup>147</sup> 'Aftab-i-Punjab' 7<sup>th</sup> August 1882, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/59, 1882, OIOC.

<sup>148</sup> Administration Report for Government of India for 1882-83 [Punjab] V/10/33, OIOC.

<sup>149</sup> Idem.

<sup>150</sup> Administration Report for Oudh, 1875-76, V/10/145, OIOC.

<sup>151</sup> At smaller stations too, the opening hours were increased, though the counters did not remain open throughout the day. Railway Report for the Year 1905 in Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, OIOC.

<sup>152</sup> Reports of ticket clerks duping unsuspecting passengers were frequent. Travelogues also offered 'advisory' against such practices.

read what was being printed. As early as 1862, the author of *Hutom Penchar Naksha* described the tricks of dishonest ticket booking clerks in the following words:

The third class booking office is swelling with people. Sitting inside their little wooden cabins the booking clerks are having a field day. One takes a whole rupee from a passenger while returning a ticket worth only four *annas* and a change of two *annas*. Any request to recover the remaining amount is promptly turned down. Another passenger pays for a ticket till Srirampur, but receives a ticket till Bali. One of the clerks is constantly blowing his nose, taking money, but neither producing tickets, nor appropriate change, disregarding the screaming passengers. All this while the jamaders and railway police constables ill-treat passengers, and make it impossible to speak to the booking clerks.<sup>153</sup>

A memorandum demanded the imposition of fines upon ticket booking clerks if they furnished passengers with tickets for shorter distance than they had paid for.<sup>154</sup> It was argued that this penalty was justified because often especially at the intermediate stations, lower class and the ignorant passengers were being cheated, and money diverted into the pockets of the ticket issuing clerks. The poor people therefore were not only cheated out of their money, but were also subjected to inconvenience and hardship. It is not surprising that in *Kim*, the eponymous narrator of the story responded at an attempt to cheat him by claiming that the trick may have worked on villagers, but he was a Lahore boy, and thus could not be easily duped.<sup>155</sup> Passengers' criticism was severe. It was argued that the fault lay with the railway companies as ticket-selling involved little pay and long hours, and therefore attracted only the dregs of Indian society, who were dishonest by nature, while the better classes stayed away from petty railway employment.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, it was argued that most ticket booking clerks were Bengalis, who were noted as corrupt, dishonest, ill-mannered, and partial to Bengali passengers.<sup>157</sup> Interestingly, these allegations were corroborated by the authors of the Bengali travelogues with the notable exception that the Bengali clerks were claimed to cheat even own kind (Bengalis).<sup>158</sup>

The rush at the ticket booking counters also created conducive conditions for professional criminals who offered their 'service' to the passengers, and bought them tickets

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<sup>153</sup> K. Sinha, *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (Calcutta, 1862).

<sup>154</sup> Memorandum by the Honourable V.J. Sunkersett, on the regulation for the protection of passengers by railway, in Railway Letters [Miscellany], L/PWD/2/190, 1865-67, OIOC.

<sup>155</sup> R. Kipling, *Kim*, (London, re-print, 2009).

<sup>156</sup> 'Oudh Akhbar' 9<sup>th</sup> August 1873, in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, North Western Provinces, L/R/5/50/1873, OIOC.

<sup>157</sup> 'Som Prakash', 4<sup>th</sup> July 1881 in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/7, 1881; also 'Jalwa-i-Tur', 8<sup>th</sup> November 1873, Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, North Western Provinces, L/R/5/50/1873, OIOC.

<sup>158</sup> Sinha, 'Hutom'; P. Dube, *Darjeeling* (Mahishadal, 1910); S.N. Ray, *Uttar Paschim Bhraman* (Calcutta, 1905)



of lesser value than they required and had paid for.<sup>159</sup> The problem was particularly severe in the large stations where ticket booking was an ordeal. The railway police constables were expected to curb these practices; but, more often than not, they were in collusion with the criminals.<sup>160</sup> A report noted that such issues made railways unpopular among lower classes.<sup>161</sup> The possibility of occurrence of this kind of crime was so widespread that the author of a Bengali travelogue even published an ‘advisory’ in the introduction of his travelogue.<sup>162</sup> The author described an incident where a group of travellers entrusted their ticket money to a fraudster who posed as a ticket agent and asked him to buy them tickets for Gaya. The thief got tickets only up to Srirampur. At Asansole the ticket inspector noticed the discrepancy and charged extra money as a fine from the travellers, besides ill-treating them. The author warned potential travellers against such criminals, and noted that the efforts to curb such crimes had had minimal impact.

Once passengers succeeded in buying tickets, they had to learn to keep their tickets secure for inspection. This was an entirely new practice. Passengers had to ensure the continued presence of the ticket on their person to avoid ill-treatment at the hands of ticket inspectors. If they failed to produce ticket when it was asked for, passengers could be thrown out of the trains, or fined, or prosecuted as criminals by the local magistrate.<sup>163</sup> Ticket inspectors were vested with legal powers to prosecute passengers found travelling without a valid ticket. The ability to exercise penal measures made the ticket inspectors liable to abuse their power and authority. They were often accused of prosecuting innocent people who had lost their tickets. In January 1888, a passenger, Parameshwar Lall, was charged before the Deputy Magistrate of Serampore with having travelled in a railway train without a ticket.<sup>164</sup> The plea of the defendant was that he had lost his ticket. He was asked prove his plea, and on failing to do so was charged with a fine. A newspaper report described the sentence upon Lall as ‘unjust, because loss of ticket cannot be proved, for things are lost without their owner knowing it, or other people seeing it.’<sup>165</sup> The report argued that the accused should have

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<sup>159</sup> The chapter on Railway Crime will discuss these issues in details.

<sup>160</sup> The Annual Railway Police Reports repeatedly drew attention to the collusion among the criminals operating on the railway network and the Railway Police constables. Proceedings of Judicial and Police department, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

<sup>161</sup> ‘Working of the Railway Police’, NWP, 1867, in Proceedings of the Police Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/44, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>162</sup> G.B. Dhar, *Sachitra Tirtha Bhraman Kahini*, (Calcutta, 1913).

<sup>163</sup> ‘Railway Bill’

<sup>164</sup> Proceedings of Judicial and Police department, Government of Bengal, 1888, OIOC.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Dainik O Samachar Chandrika’, 10<sup>th</sup> January 1888, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/14, 1888, OIOC.

proved purchase of a ticket; but since it was almost impossible to prove purchase, in such prosecutions, the burden should lie upon the railway authorities of showing that the accused intended to cheat them.

The ticket inspectors' were known for uncivil and high-handed behavior, especially towards the 'lower class of native passengers', though Indian passengers travelling in the upper class carriages were by no means immune to ill-treatment.<sup>166</sup> In his autobiography *JeevanSmriti*, Rabindranath Tagore recollected an instance of ill-treatment at the hands of the ticket inspector on his maiden railway journey.<sup>167</sup> On this occasion, the ticket inspector was suspicious of the poet's actual age, and wanted his father to pay full fare for him. Indignant at the allegation of trying to save the difference between the full fare and the half-ticket, Debendranath paid the full fare. So incensed was he at the behaviour of a 'lowly half-caste Eurasian' that he even declined to receive the change offered and flung it across the platform instead.<sup>168</sup> The behaviour of the ticket inspectors was an impediment to the development of coaching traffic. The railway authorities were aware of the defects of the system and they rightly described it as 'harmful and damaging to the railway system in general.'<sup>169</sup> They also acknowledged that in India, 'Europeans and the Eurasians behaved most uncivilly with even the respectable natives, and it reflects badly upon the English character in general.' But the problem was not restricted to Anglo-Indian ticket collectors. A newspaper report noted how passengers were 'freely beaten' by the Bengali ticket collectors at Howrah station.<sup>170</sup> The problem was not easy to solve. A remedy was sought in the dismissal of the railway employees accused of ill-treatment or uncivil behaviour.<sup>171</sup> In 1867, a railway official was dismissed for ill-treating Baboo Baikunt Roy.<sup>172</sup> In the investigation instituted by the railway company, the behaviour of the accused was proven to be true. But such cases were rare. The complexities of legal process, and the cost of the lengthy procedures, often dissuaded 'native' passengers from complaining, and they preferred to endure ill-treatment. A letter from the Lieutenant Governor of the NWP described the situation in the following words:

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<sup>166</sup> Selections from the Native Newspaper Reports from Bengal and North-Western Provinces, L/R/5 Series, OIOC.

<sup>167</sup> R.N. Tagore, *JeevanSmriti* (Calcutta, re-print, 1980).

<sup>168</sup> The issue of ticket inspectors was complicated because most often they were Eurasians. The 'better class of natives' regarded them as social upstarts, and resented their power. But, ticket inspectors in general were ill-mannered and rude.

<sup>169</sup> L/PWD/2/ 69, Home Correspondence, 'B' Series, copies of letters sent, 1849-1879, OIOC.

<sup>170</sup> 'Sanjivani', 14<sup>th</sup> February 1891, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/17, 1891, OIOC.

<sup>171</sup> The Proceedings of Railway Department, Government of India, OIOC.

<sup>172</sup> 'Letters to the Agent EIRC', August 1867, in Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/83, 1867, OIOC.

That portion of the native community, from which third class passengers are drawn have no notion whether they should prefer their complaints to the deputy agent or to any other person and in 99 cases out of a 100 they would rather suffer the wrong, than trouble themselves to obtain redress. The effects however of inattention to their reasonable comforts and to their rights to be civilly treated will follow – natives of respectability will not travel by rail at all unless they are protected from such behaviour.<sup>173</sup>

In the early twentieth century the EIR introduced the system of Travelling Ticket Inspectors (TTE). ‘Native’ passengers resented the TTEs, and accused them of handing over to the police persons found travelling without tickets, although they might have only lost them during the journey.<sup>174</sup> One newspaper report drew the attention of the Railway Board to the large number of prosecutions since the introduction of the staff of TTE on the EIR.<sup>175</sup> Whilst admitting that these officials have proved eminently useful to the railway company, it pointed out that every passenger who travelled without a ticket did not do so with intent to defraud. It was often difficult to obtain a ticket at the booking office due to a rush of passengers; and it was suggested that it would be better if more cases were treated by the railway authorities themselves with a prosecution only in cases in which there was an obvious intent to defraud.

An aspect of the ticket system which responded directly to ‘native’ passenger demand was the coaching fare. The railway companies did not have much say in deciding the fare structure because in India it was customary to leave the question of fares in the hands of the local governments.<sup>176</sup> But railway companies often adjusted the fare to reach a compromise between attracting passenger traffic and maintaining a respectable amount of profit.<sup>177</sup> Very often revision in fares of one company led to changes in the fare structure across the railway companies serving that particular region.<sup>178</sup> The price of third class tickets was kept deliberately low because it was claimed that ‘the natives of India are inured to travelling long distances on foot or in crowded bullock carts, so for short distances they will not take advantage of the rail unless they can travel very cheaply by it.’<sup>179</sup> As a proof of Indian passengers’ proclivity to travel cheaply it was argued that the ‘natives preferred giving up

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<sup>173</sup> ‘Letter from the Lieutenant Governor NWP to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of NWP, Railway Branch, Public Works Department, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of North-Western Province and Oudh, P/237/26, 1859, OIOC.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Jasus’, May 1909, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/84, 1909, OIOC.

<sup>175</sup> ‘The Indian People’, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1909, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/84, 1909, OIOC.

<sup>176</sup> L/PWD/2/68, 1862, Home Correspondence, ‘B’ Series, Copies of letters sent, 1849-1879, OIOC.

<sup>177</sup> Letter Dated February 1866, in Letters of Eastern Bengal Railway Company, L/PWD/2/158, OIOC.

<sup>178</sup> Idem, most companies followed the fare structure of the EIRC.

<sup>179</sup> Letter dated May 1868 from Major General Dunston, Managing Director of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company, to Major General Beadle, Agent of the Company in Letters of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Company, L/PWD/2/177, 1868-1869, OIOC.

their caste than part with the pence.’<sup>180</sup> But even the ‘low’ price determined by the railway authorities was expensive for those classes of people whom the railway companies wanted to attract. Horace Bell, the Consulting Engineer to the Government of India for Railways noted: ‘if a reduction [in fare] is made, it must be so considerable as to induce people to travel who cannot now afford to do so and to stimulate more frequent journeys on the part of those now using our railways in this class.’<sup>181</sup> To substantiate this claim he argued that even very low fares on the Tirhoot Railways failed to attract the large number of coolies going from Saran and Tirhoot across Kosi to the Assam and Darjeeling tea gardens.<sup>182</sup> He stopped gangs of coolies walking on the road running parallel with the railways, and asked them as to why they walked while the railway was available for a good part of the journey. The invariable reply was that they could not afford even the low fare. Bell concluded that even if time was of any value to these people, they could not afford to use quicker method of transit.

Furthering the argument he noted that, on another occasion, he met a body of pilgrims who were from a village near Lucknow, and travelling on foot to Baidyanath. They told him that they could not afford to go by rail, and yet they admitted having saved or borrowed for expenses of the road and the pilgrimage. They informed him that a two-way journey by rail from their village to Baidyanath (a distance of 478 miles) would have cost them 12 rupees; if they could do this for 6 rupees (by rail) they would *of course* use the railway. Bell concluded his report by noting that he could give ‘many more illustrations to show that our lowest fare is still far too high for the class it is intended for and that it reaches only those who are fairly well off, or who are obliged from family or business reasons to travel quickly.’<sup>183</sup> On a similar note, a newspaper report argued: ‘the railways afford great facilities for travelling and trade but its (*sic*) fares are high and this is why the poor classes still perform their journeys on foot.’<sup>184</sup> The railway companies realised that in order to attract passenger traffic in India the tariff had to be lower than other parts of the world.<sup>185</sup> Modifications were needed from practices prevalent in England, or in the Continent, and the fares and facilities had to be

<sup>180</sup> J. Danvers, (Government Director of Indian Railways) ‘Personal Inspection Report’, in The Report to the Secretary of State for India in Council on Railways in India, Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, OIOC

<sup>181</sup> H. Bell, ‘Reduction of lowest class fares’, in Proceedings of the Railway Conference, V/25/720/29, 1893, OIOC.

<sup>182</sup> Idem, the rate for third class carriage on the Tirhoot Railway was 3/4<sup>th</sup> of one pie.

<sup>183</sup> Idem.

<sup>184</sup> Hindustan, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1891, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/68, 1891, OIOC.

<sup>185</sup> The Annual Reports to the Secretary of State for India in Council for Railways in India frequently compared railway rates from different parts of the world and approved low passenger fare on Indian Railways as appropriate for Indian conditions. See, Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, OIOC.

determined in accordance with Indian notions. In order to attract more traffic, the EBR in 1864 introduced a fourth class. It was intended for ‘coolies or labourers only, or to attract a class of people who cannot afford to pay the third class fares.’<sup>186</sup> In a similar move, the EIRC introduced an ‘intermediate class’, though here the target was to attract ‘respectable, middle-class Indians who despised to travel with lower class passengers in the third class carriages.’<sup>187</sup> This calculation paid off, and the intermediate class of EIRC became extremely popular.

Evidently, the social impact of these practises was limited in class terms because the poor could not afford tickets. But not as limited over time as one might expect because fares were adjusted to meet the needs of poorer travellers. At times, however, even lowering the third class fares could not stimulate traffic. The ‘native’ gentlemen and merchants of Lahore informed a railway official that third class passengers by rule travelled either on duty or business. And, they looked out for the cheapest conveyance with some regard for time. If they found this to be the railway, they would take it. But the fact that the railway made the journey cheaper did not induce them to travel if it could be avoided.<sup>188</sup> Yet the Indian response to railway transport was often enthusiastic. The railway offered speed and ability to transport irrespective of seasons and weather conditions. The Indian railway travellers appreciated these advantages; but, was by no means ready to accept uncomfortable transit. The land and boat carriage could be slow but these might be more comfortable and flexible, and ‘native’ passengers did not hesitate to use them as viable alternatives.

The occasional disinclination to use the railway network can perhaps explained by the difficulties Indians faced in adapting to the railway-specific travelling practices. For instance, when the practice of issuing tickets throughout the day was finally introduced at large railway stations, it became a source of perplexity for ignorant people. A newspaper reported how passengers unfamiliar with railway travelling bought tickets and got into any train which they found waiting near the platform.<sup>189</sup> This often led them to travel by a wrong train. Further, the railway tariff policy favoured long distance travellers over those travelling relatively shorter distances.<sup>190</sup> One incentive could have been return tickets. But for the railway companies

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<sup>186</sup> Letter from F. Prestage, Agent EBR to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, Railway Department, Dated 10<sup>th</sup> June 1864, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/32, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>187</sup> Letters of the EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, OIOC.

<sup>188</sup> Letter from Colonel C. Pollard dated August 1873 to the Secretary to the Government of India, Public Works Department, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/578, OIOC.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Samay’ 21<sup>st</sup> May 1897, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ Bengal, L/R/5/23, 1897, OIOC.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Railway Bill’.

these meant less income and they hesitated to extend the system. Till 1872 the EIRC denied the facility of issuing return tickets to its third class passengers.<sup>191</sup> Even when it offered the option, the ticket remained valid for such a short period that it was not profitable for passengers to use the service. Roughly around the same time the Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal urged the EBR Board to introduce the concession of third class return tickets to and from Goalundo to Calcutta on the basis of a growth of 'native' passenger traffic.<sup>192</sup> Earlier in 1869, the Traffic Superintendent of the Calcutta and South-Eastern State Railway argued for an experimental introduction of return tickets for fourth class passengers from Calcutta to Basrah in order to tap the pilgrim traffic.<sup>193</sup> It was noted that the company had failed to earn any significant revenue from this annual pilgrimage because hundreds of passengers walked in consequence of not being able to pay for their passage. The railway management was advised to have special return excursion tickets at 8 annas each, which allowed passengers to also transport a goat without extra charge. Not surprisingly, the measure became popular.

But the provision of issuing return tickets was by no means uniform across the railway managements. Such factors along with the location of the stations, the timings of the trains, and inconvenience of ticket booking facilities, discouraged many to travel by the rail unless forced to do so. 'Native' passengers often undertook a train journey only when the distance travelled compensated the effort expended. But their responses indicate continuous process of negotiation, and interaction with the railway authorities, marked by an acknowledgement of mutual significance.

In most cases railway travellers responded favourably to the reduction of fares. The EIRC regularly adjusted its fares to fluctuations in the traffic to redress 'native passenger grievance.'<sup>194</sup> In 1868, in two separate petitions, the daily commuters travelling by the third and the fourth class on the EBR demanded a reversal of 'recent increase' in fares.<sup>195</sup> The

<sup>191</sup> Letters from EIRC, L/PWD/2/88, OIOC.

<sup>192</sup> Letters of EBSR, L/2/PWD/161, 1873-74, OIOC.

<sup>193</sup> Letter dated 4<sup>th</sup> June 1869 from W. Goodwin, Acting Traffic Superintendent, Calcutta and South-Eastern State Railway, to the Committee of Management, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, 1869, P/433/46, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>194</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84; the Agent of the company noted that it was their policy to reduce passenger fare whenever the coaching traffic showed signs of falling off. Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/43, 1868; also see, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' from Bengal and North-Western Provinces, L/R/5 Series, OIOC.

<sup>195</sup> 'Increase of fares on EBR' from Baboo Umbica Charan Mookerjee and others to F.S. Stanton, Officiating General Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Railway Branch and 'Petition from Benimadhav Mukhopadhyay' to the Lieutenant Governor, Bengal, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/43, 1868, OIOC.

Lieutenant Governor of Bengal accepted their demands, and ordered rescindment of the decision. The language of these petitions deserves attention. To support their claim of reduction of fares, Ambika Charan Mukherjee, the author of the first petition quoted from a minute of Lord Dalhousie in which he had ‘promised’ not to increase the third class fares above three pies per mile. Further, Mukherjee enclosed a comparative statement of fares charged, which showed that on the short suburban length which contributed to more than 1/9<sup>th</sup> to the entire passenger traffic of the line the increase had been excessive, being in some instances almost fifty per cent over what was previously charged. He concluded by noting that had the season been favourable for availing boat service the passengers would have used that instead. The second petition noted:

We fail to trace any principle on which the new fares have been fixed, except a determination not to receive fractions of an *anna*. This is actually the case with the fourth class passengers from Dum-Dum to Calcutta, the distance is little more than four miles, the fare payable according to fixed rate of three pie per mile would be one anna, but the fare now charged is two annas. The above grievance is also felt more or less by all the third and fourth class passengers journeying from and to any station between Kanchrapara and Calcutta, who by their avocations are obliged to make daily journeys and who are generally men of limited circumstances. The success of railway enterprise in India will depend on the cheapness of the fares for the poorer and the working classes forming the bulk of the passengers. But, the cheapness of the rates has been in a great measure neutralised in the case of the stations of the EBR, which are close to Calcutta, by the adoption of an unnecessary and we may say inequitable rule.<sup>196</sup>

From these petitions, we see that ‘native’ passengers displayed an awareness of the railway rules that regulated passenger tariff, and an ability to demand service which they considered just. More striking is their knowledge of the railway economy, and its dependence on ‘native’ passengers. The railway companies too, realised the importance of ‘native’ passenger traffic. And as with timetables, here again, one can identify a process of interaction, and negotiation between Indian passengers and the railway authorities. ‘Native’ passengers quickly adapted to the demands of the ticketing system, and proffered practical suggestions to improve the arrangements. On some occasions their ideas were even implemented. This suggests that the indignities and experiences associated with the railway encounters were more complex than assumed.

These experiences were certainly shaped by ideas of race, and also by social status or class. For instance, Indian passengers protested against the rule that the Europeans did not require to buy platform tickets, and could enter stations at any time, even when they were not travelling. This measure was rightly interpreted as discriminating on grounds of race, and was widely criticised.<sup>197</sup> A pleader of the Punjab High Court even brought a suit against the EIRC

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<sup>196</sup> Idem.

<sup>197</sup> The newspaper reports from Bengal and NWP suggests that the protest was truly widespread.

for a refund of six pies, an amount he had to pay to purchase a platform ticket to enter Delhi station.<sup>198</sup> But, as is evident from the issues surrounding booking and inspection of tickets, ‘native’ passengers were cheated, harassed, and ill-treated mostly by Indian railway employees.<sup>199</sup> Moreover, poor and illiterate passengers were more likely to be ill-treated than their educated or wealthy counterparts. It was perhaps no coincidence that the authors of the travelogues witnessed passenger harassments, but were never victims of such behaviour. Further, the introduction and popularity of the fourth, and the intermediate class respectively is suggestive of differentiation within the homogenised category of ‘native’ passengers. Not surprisingly, this distinction was apparent to the railway authorities as well.<sup>200</sup> The railway companies as well as the government were aware that the conditions under which railways operated in India were different. Social distinctions were acknowledged, and even honoured. The railway companies admitted that the third class passengers were the mainstay of their revenue, and that they therefore needed attention. On the other hand, the companies sought above all to attract ‘respectable natives.’<sup>201</sup> This holds a vital clue to understand the complexities of experiences generated by the railway travel practices, and also offer entry-points to assess their broader impact on Indian society.

This chapter focused on the introduction of railway-specific travel practices in colonial India. It underlined the complexities of this process, which contest well-established colonial as well as post-colonial stereotypes about the nature of this transformation.<sup>202</sup> In the first place, it shows that the responses of Indian railway passengers played an important role in shaping these travel practices. They were aware of the significance of their number to the railway economy, and wanted modifications in policies and practices which they found unsuitable. The demands for convenient timetables, and better train schedules, reflect their ability to ask for services which enabled them to use railways to their advantage. The railway companies usually acknowledged their pecuniary role and fulfilled the demands to ensure sufficient passenger traffic. The chapter suggests that the travel discipline imposed by the railway did not represent as sharp a departure as has been argued. It shows that the time discipline and inflexibility attributed to the railway timetables were often compromised, and as a result the possibility of sudden and radical changes was diffused. In addition, the railway

<sup>198</sup> ‘The platform ticket case’ in ‘Advocate’, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1910, Selections from the Native Newspaper Reports, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/85, 1910, OIOC.

<sup>199</sup> The ticket booking clerks who were notorious for cheating passengers were all Indians.

<sup>200</sup> The railway authorities were not surprised by the presence of social distinctions and a desire to maintain it, perhaps because they were familiar with similar though not identical differences back home.

<sup>201</sup> See footnote 127 and 141.

<sup>202</sup> Post-colonial is strictly chronological, i.e., post 1947.



travel discipline had differential impact on people travelling for different purposes. For instance, its impact on daily commuters travelling to nearby cities for employment was sharper than, say, on pilgrims whose travel plans were also guided by the 'religious time'. Besides, 'railway time' was neither the earliest nor the only instrument through which a distinct, linear time discipline was imposed on the Indian society. Office and factory times also played important roles in creating time discipline. Of these, the office time was imposed much earlier than the railway time, and it played a significant role in shaping responses to the railway time. If anything, the complaints about unpunctuality of trains highlight Indians' ability to adhere to a practice, and resent deviations. Such behaviours also challenge the idea of an absence of a sense of time among Indians. Perhaps familiarity with time regulation, and the co-existence of different kinds of time (religious, agrarian) played a role in helping Indian passengers to adapt railway time travel and other practices.

The railway travel practices were a combination of new (tickets) and modified (timetables) rules which transformed the experiences of travel in colonial India. The chapter questions another colonial stereotype of Indians being shy of innovations. As the above discussion shows, Indians certainly did not hesitate to take up new practices such as tickets, and quickly adapted to the demands of a radically new transport system. Further, as the petitions and responses around ticket price illustrate, the process of adapting to the railway travel practices was punctuated by negotiations based on an awareness of difference as well as financial practicalities. In other words, the social impact of these practices, though qualified in class terms, was by no means less significant because, travel practices were often modified to cater to a wider audience. Moreover, it can be argued that the impact of the connection between the objective and mechanical practices of travel, and the responses of Indian passengers went beyond social, and had a political impact. Railway travel was a collective experience for the traveller, albeit one subdivided by class and to an extent gender and community. It added to the many forces that were defining such collective categories - directly as something experienced and not just talked about or represented. Collective protests and demands were made over this travel (e.g. the price of fares, ticket-buying conditions, cheating, bullying). These had an impact on railway policies, largely for commercial reasons. Together these imply both (a) reinforcement of collective identities, at several levels (class, gender, religion); and (b) encouragement of certain ways of securing their interests (e.g. petitions, newspaper articles), encouragement by experience again, of what methods succeed. This implies a political as well as a social impact, and shows how policy impact linked to social impact. The next chapter will focus on the sites (railway

stations, compartments, waiting rooms) where Indian passengers encountered railway travel practices.

## Chapter Three

### *Railway travel practices: the new sites*

Rudyard Kipling vividly described the scene at the Lahore station where Lama and Kim encountered, for the first time, the ‘fire-carriage’ - the fort-like railway station, third class passengers sleeping in the waiting rooms and springing to life as the train approached, the station filled with clamour and shouting, cries of water and sweetmeat vendors, shouts of ‘native’ policemen and shrill yells of women gathering up their baskets, their families and their husbands.<sup>203</sup> Writing a decade later than Kipling, Fakir Chandra Chatterjee, author of a Bengali travelogue, echoed similar sentiments and declared his ‘love’ for the ever-bustling stations especially the EIRC ones.<sup>204</sup> These accounts conjure a romantic image of the railway. Being written at the turn of the century, they also reveal an already well-established relation between the Indian railway passengers, and the sites and practices associated with the railway journey. But this relation was neither romantic nor was it immediately established. The railway operations created new sites: the stations, the platforms, ticket booking counters, the waiting and refreshment rooms, and the railway carriages. At these sites railway travel practices acquired specific meanings and passengers therefore had to adapt to these sites. The process was gradual, marked by negotiation as well as challenges. This chapter focuses on these sites and the ways in which ‘native’ passengers adapted to them. As in the previous chapter, here too the emphasis will be on the role of Indian railway passengers in shaping this process, as these interactions would offer entry-point to assess social impact through railway policies. The chapter is divided into two sections: the first is about the station and includes a discussion of food and water arrangements; and the second section is on the railway carriages.

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<sup>203</sup> R. Kipling, *Kim* (London, re-print, 2009).

<sup>204</sup> F.C. Chatterjee, *Pather Katha* (Calcutta, 1911).

## I

The stations were the first sites where passengers encountered novelties of the railway journey. Here they bought their tickets and waited (usually for several hours) to catch the trains. Initially, the railway stations were simple brick structures, and the railway companies explained the pragmatic architecture on limited capital outlay. Railways in India was a speculative venture; and though assured of 5% guarantee on the capital expended, the railway companies did not want to invest heavily in the station establishments. In 1876, Juland 'Danvers expressed his 'surprise' at the terminal arrangements of the EIRC at Calcutta and the GIPR at Bombay and thought in both places the station accommodation was inadequate, and the buildings unworthy of those large concerns.<sup>205</sup> But by the late nineteenth century whether it was the EIRC terminal at Howrah, or the EBSR at Sealdah - the railway stations of India especially the principal ones were transformed from being mere brick structures to imposing architectural splendours.<sup>206</sup> This evolution of station architecture was best conveyed by the 'Victoria Terminus'- the termini of the GIPR at Bombay. Completed in 1887 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, it was one of the largest buildings constructed by the British in India, and continues to remain the biggest station building in Asia.<sup>207</sup> The imperative behind the construction of these grandiose statements has been variously explained by strategic importance of specific stations like Lahore, Lucknow and Kanpur and hence their fortress like appearance; to Company pride and loyalty; to an architectural expression of a confident colonial power.<sup>208</sup> This stylistic transformation was the culmination of a wider process of the expansion of the station establishment which began with the commencement of the railway operations in the mid- nineteenth century India.

Irrespective of their size, railway stations in colonial India were strictly segregated along racial lines. The establishment for Indians usually consisted of a simple brick and mortar structure, which served as the station precinct, ticket booking counters and the

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<sup>205</sup> Juland Danvers was the Government Director of the Indian Railways and made this comment on his personal inspection tour of the Indian Railways in 1876, see, J. Danvers, 'Personal Inspection Report', published in the Report Submitted to the Secretary of State for India in Council for Railway in India, Command Number 1584, 1876, Parliamentary Papers, V/4 Series, OIOC.

<sup>206</sup> Howrah and Sealdah were terminal stations for Calcutta for the EIRC and EBSR respectively.

<sup>207</sup> T.R. Metcalfe, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley, 2002).

<sup>208</sup> The railway stations were meant to convey a range of meanings symbolising the colonial state's ability to control politics as well as advanced technical knowledge. And the point was not lost on Indian onlookers. The authors of the travelogues often used the symbolism of the stations to initiate a comparative discussion on India and Europe. See for useful overview see Metcalfe, 'An Imperial'; also V. Oldenburg, *The making of colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877* (New Jersey, 1984); and G. Huddleston, *History of the East Indian Railway Company* (Calcutta, 1906).

platforms, all in one. But the rising passenger traffic forced the railway companies to think about improving the ‘native’ sections of the stations. Passengers regularly complained about the inadequate arrangements at the railway stations and petitions were sent to the government. In a circular issued by the Government of India in 1864, the attention of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal was ‘invited’ to aspects of the administration of the railways in Bengal; especially for improving the accommodation at stations for ‘native’ passengers, which the Government of India believed had received ‘too little attention.’<sup>209</sup> Station accommodation included: the provision of latrines and urinals at all stations according to the size of the station, arrangements for the supply of food, and drinking water for all classes ‘in a manner suitable to the habits of the natives of the country’, and at all important stations where large number of passengers habitually collected, a provision of proper accommodation in the way of *serais*, with suitable attendants for their management.<sup>210</sup> Instead of the railway companies, these duties were devolved on the local district officials. The concluding paragraphs of this circular illustrates the position of the government in relation to the railway administration, and deserves to be quoted in full:

Considering the position of the third class passengers, who form nine-tenths of the travellers by rail in India and the complete absence of that powerful check on the management which in England is exercised by the public itself, the Governor-General in Council considers it to be the duty of the Government to cause its inspecting officers to supply this want and to press on the railway officers reasonable recommendations for the correction of any defects which may come to light. The Government of India has every confidence that the management of railways in all parts of India will be conducted in a manner that will give satisfaction to the public and fulfil the requirements of the trust placed in the hands of the railway companies; but if occasion should require, the Government must firmly insist on the removal of all just causes of complaint and in that behalf must exercise the powers given to it under the railway contracts if necessary.<sup>211</sup>

The following year (1865) the Government of Bengal appointed a committee to make adequate provision for the ‘health, comfort and decency of travellers.’<sup>212</sup> In the ensuing enquiry, passenger complaints about the lack of facilities in stations came to the fore. The committee made several recommendations to improve the arrangements. The first was about proper accommodation at the stations. The committee noted: ‘at every station, the railway companies are bound to provide passengers waiting for trains with shelter from sun and rain; and that where sufficient covered space is not already provided verandas in front of existing buildings or additional sheds should be erected.’ The second suggestion was to build urinals and latrines at the stations. Erecting shades at the stations was among the first and most

<sup>209</sup> ‘Administration of railways in Bengal’, Circular No. 13, dated 27<sup>th</sup> August 1864, from Colonel R. Strachey, Secretary to Government of India, [PWD] to the Joint Secretary, Government of Bengal, [PWD] in the proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/33, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>210</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>211</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>212</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, 1865, OIOC.

common improvements. But the inspection report for the second quarter of the EIRC reveals that these improvements were confined mainly to the Bengal Presidency. This was partly because it had earlier received the government's attention in 1864 and also the EIRC considered the region as the 'paying portion' as against the NWP.<sup>213</sup> A petition to the Viceroy from the British Indian Association, NWP, called for improvements in station establishment in their part of the EIRC network.<sup>214</sup> In the petition, the first point was about the want of shelter and accommodation at the stations for third class passengers. The lengthy wait at the stations was argued to be a result of faulty timetable arrangements, and habitual unpunctuality of the trains, especially in the NWP. Moreover, remote locations of the stations necessitated passengers reaching stations well in advance of the scheduled arrival of the trains. As a result 'masses' were exposed to the inclemency of the weather, an exposure that was alleged to be the cause of illness or death of 'many poor natives.' The petition proposed an 'inexpensive' remedy of building sheds depending upon the size of the stations and putting up notices in vernacular stating the purpose of the sheds.

The language of these exchanges, the government circular and the passengers' petition is instructive. Both exhibit paternalism and use similar ideas to argue their case.<sup>215</sup> Even if the circular served only rhetorical purposes (which it did not) it suggests an interest in the well-being of the poor and a concern with public health.<sup>216</sup> This interest was perhaps part of a longer trajectory of concern about sanitation influenced by ideas of 'germ-theory', and the interventions in the affairs of the railway companies were intended as preventive measures to minimise risks of the transmission of diseases.<sup>217</sup> It was no coincidence that, though the circular was from the Government of India, the initiative for the sanitary measures came from the local government of Bengal and was confined to that region.<sup>218</sup> Interestingly, the petition too, made a causal connection between lack of adequate facilities at the railway

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<sup>213</sup> Idem.

<sup>214</sup> Along with 3,251 people this petition was signed by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who was the then Secretary of the British Indian Association, NWP. 'The humble petition of the British Indian Association, North-Western province', dated 16<sup>th</sup> October 1866, Aligarh in 'Miscellany Railway Letters', L/PWD/2/190 (1865-1867), OIOC.

<sup>215</sup> See footnotes 9 and 12.

<sup>216</sup> The circular led to actual improvements is evident from the newspaper reports which welcomed these changes but demanded better maintenance of the facilities. See 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP', L/R/5 Series, OIOC.

<sup>217</sup> From the late eighteenth century onwards various ideas about the importance of ventilation and sanitation had influenced health policies especially in the tropical colonies and this concern with sanitation at the railway stations reflects similar belief.

<sup>218</sup> The Bengal Presidency especially the city of Calcutta had long been the centre of sanitary experiments which included among other things schemes for better drainage and public employment of scavengers.

stations and passengers' ill-health.<sup>219</sup> The use of this logic displays the ability and the awareness of the petitioners to frame their arguments in a language which could be effective. By choosing to highlight issues of sanitation and public health in the first place, which were essentially western imports, it effectively deployed the ideas back to an audience (the government) which was responsible for its dissemination.<sup>220</sup>

But the petition's use of paternalism was more complex. While, on one hand, it appealed to the government's paternalism and cited previous interventions in railway matters as precedents; on the other, it demanded better facilities on behalf of 'the very poor, the very ignorant and the very helpless.' Manu Goswami is right in noting this as an expression of the competitive struggle between an increasingly assertive colonial middle class and the state agencies over the self-assigned task of representing subaltern communities.<sup>221</sup> But this observation discounts one significant aspect: the paternalism and claims of representing the 'masses' were not notional but substantive. The petition implicitly assumed and admitted the differentiation in the category of 'native' passengers. This cannot be overlooked as it influenced formulation and implementation of railway policies. By admitting to the presence of waiting rooms for the rich and wealthy passengers the petition underlined the existence of railway policies governed by the ideas of status and social respectability. Interestingly, as the petition illustrates, the government and the petitioners called for similar improvements. Here again, as in the previous chapter, it can be argued that these railway-specific experiences produced identifications of shared or group interests. But it also set up rival spokesmen for it: government and the petitioners.

Besides waiting sheds, station establishment included toilets and waiting rooms. Official records, and reports in the Indian languages newspapers are the main sources of information on arrangements of these facilities for passengers travelling in the lower class carriages. The sanitary arrangements for third class passengers were inadequate at best. Initially toilets were built only in the principal stations and these included Howrah, Benaras,

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<sup>219</sup> This petition is one of the earliest to make a connection between conditions of travel and passenger health. In later decades similar allegations were routinely made, and railway travel was argued to be a potent cause of causing and transmitting disease. The latter role however was widely recognised even by the government agencies, though they continued to deny conditions of railway travel as causing illness.

<sup>220</sup> As David Arnold rightly notes, till the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the use of western medicine and knowledge was confined mostly to urban elites (like the petitioners) and on occasions it was appropriated to achieve various ends. This case illustrates the process well, the petitioners were definitely aware of the ideas of public health (whether they 'used' it or not is a different question) and deployed it because they knew it would draw the government's attention. See, D. Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, (London, 1993).

<sup>221</sup> Goswami, 'Producing'.

Allahabad, Kanpur, Agra and Delhi.<sup>222</sup> The arrangement was inadequate to cope with the demands of passenger traffic, especially because the third class carriages lacked in-built toilets, and passengers had to wait till the trains reached one of the bigger stations to use the facilities. Toilet facilities were demanded in other important stations which attracted substantial passenger traffic. The rising passenger complaints led the agent of the EIRC to look into the matter and the complaints were found to be valid.<sup>223</sup> The EIRC board authorised the consulting engineer of the company to provide latrine and urinal arrangements for 'native' passengers in the stations listed in the report. These stations were: Howrah, Burdwan, Raniganj, Barakar, Bolpur, Rampurhat, Nalhati, Tinpahari, Sahebganj, Bhagalpur, Jamalpur, Mokameh, Danapur, Buxar, Patna, Bankipur and Arrah.<sup>224</sup> The suggestions were approved by the EIRC board and capital expenditure allowed because the measures were thought to be 'essential to the well-being and reputation of the line.'<sup>225</sup> But construction of toilets was not enough. In absence of toilets in the third class carriages and the rising passenger traffic, the issue was to keep the facilities clean. Frequent complaints were made regarding the filthy state of the toilets. The issue assumed a serious proportion when in 1865 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal went on an inspection tour of railway arrangements in the province and observed 'it is plain that the latrines are not attended to', and attributed it to the lack of discipline on the line.<sup>226</sup>

In response, the Board of EIRC recommended periodic inspection of the line and appointed a sanitary commission to suggest improvements.<sup>227</sup> The report submitted by the Sanitary Commission concurred with the views of the Lieutenant Governor, and suggested employment of more cleaners to tackle the problem. This suggestion was unevenly implemented. In the big stations like Burdwan or Patna the toilets were usually better attended than in the smaller ones. In most cases the EIRC officials argued that it was difficult to keep the toilets clean because of 'native habits'; but in reality the company employed only a handful of cleaners. This policy affected the condition in which toilets in the stations were kept. The periodic inspection reports of stations of the EIRC noted that the toilets were better kept in stations below Allahabad, while those between Allahabad and Delhi were

<sup>222</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/80, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>223</sup> The Annual Administration report of Bengal Presidency for the year 1863-64, V/10/26, OIOC.

<sup>224</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/80, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>225</sup> Idem.

<sup>226</sup> Memorandum on Report of the Sanitary Commissioner, in Letters from EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>227</sup> Idem.



‘indifferently managed.’<sup>228</sup> This regional disparity in the maintenance of station establishment was probably true because complaints about filthy toilets in the stations above Allahabad were also made by European passengers. In one such complaint certain Mr Dayne sent a representation to the board of the EIRC pointing out the inadequate arrangements for baths at the stations (above Allahabad) and the conditions of the urinals and the latrines.<sup>229</sup> The complainant was a businessman and frequently travelled on the line between Agra and Calcutta. Toilets for ‘native’ passengers were usually better kept in the stations managed by the Oudh and Rohilkhand railway company. The reports in Indian language newspapers frequently underlined the difference between the upkeep of toilets in the stations managed by the two companies, and urged the EIRC to follow its rival’s policies.

The question of waiting rooms was more complicated because of the capital outlay involved. Constructing waiting rooms for upper class passengers did not involve much investment as their proportion to the total share of passenger traffic was negligible.<sup>230</sup> In most principal stations of the EIR separate waiting rooms were also built for lower class passengers. But their maintenance was often neglected and the sanitary commission appointed by the company observed that even where retiring rooms had been provided their utility was diminished by the ‘filthy state’ in which they were generally kept.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, these rooms did not have any provision for lighting and post sunset passengers were forced to wait in the dark. The sanitary commission proposed gas lighting in these rooms. The EIRC accepted the suggestion, but it was implemented only in Howrah and Allahabad. In both these places gas pipes were laid, and the third class passenger waiting room was lit. The passenger traffic at these stations was argued to be the factor which justified the increased expenditure and the company refused to expand the facility to smaller stations till the late 1870s.<sup>232</sup> The waiting rooms for upper class passengers were well-furnished. Theoretically, any passenger travelling in the upper class carriages could use these rooms. But occasionally Indians were denied access. Though the discrimination was racial, the difference was implied rather than spelt out because there was no single, uniform rule denying entry to Indian passengers. And in its absence various railway managements chose to do what they felt like. Often the

<sup>228</sup> Quarterly Inspection Report of the stations on EIRC for the year 1867-68, in Letters from EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>229</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>230</sup> It seems the practice of maintaining differential standards for waiting rooms was borrowed from practices prevalent in Britain. Till the late 1870s there was no provision for waiting rooms for the third class passengers in Britain. See, ‘The Oxford Companion’.

<sup>231</sup> Memorandum on Report of the Sanitary Commissioner, in Letters from EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>232</sup> Idem.

question was decided by the individual station masters in the station under their jurisdiction.<sup>233</sup>

Denial of access was usually justified by using the logic of ‘cultural difference’. Indian habits of hookah smoking, chewing *paan* and spitting its juice were argued to be ‘disgusting’ to European sensibilities, and were noted to be the main reasons that the railway companies prevented Indians from using the same facilities as Europeans.<sup>234</sup> Offensive habits were argued to be not restricted to any social groups, and since ‘unfortunately even well-educated and respectable natives of good families’ could not let go these habits, therefore they were not welcomed to use the waiting rooms.<sup>235</sup> Besides these, a lack of personal hygiene among Indians, the males habitually keeping the upper body unclothed, and the use of smelly oils on body and hair were also cited as additional reasons for denial of entry to the waiting rooms.<sup>236</sup> Interestingly, Indian passengers accepted the validity of ‘cultural difference’ argument and claimed to have similar repugnance for European manners especially the obnoxious smoke of cigars and European women travelling without *purdah*.<sup>237</sup> Frequent demands were made for separate waiting rooms for Indian passengers travelling in the upper class carriages.<sup>238</sup> The Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company fulfilled this demand and built separate waiting rooms in the stations under its management.<sup>239</sup> By the late nineteenth century, rising passenger traffic and periodic government intervention led to sustained improvements in the station establishment for ‘native’ passengers. Such changes were frequently noted in the travelogues, and stations like Burdwan, Sahebganj, Allahabad, Lucknow, Tundla and Agra were often appreciated for their establishment arrangements.<sup>240</sup>

Passengers waiting at the stations needed food, drinking water and retiring rooms. The success of railway enterprise in India hinged on attracting ‘native’ passenger traffic. To ensure passenger presence the companies had to think in terms of providing basic facilities in the railway stations. The management of the railway companies agreed that in a country of the size of India with its prolonged and severe summer, food and drinking facilities had to be

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<sup>233</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1867, OIOC.

<sup>234</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>235</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>236</sup> E.M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: the physical experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947*, (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>237</sup> ‘Oudh Akhbar’ 18<sup>th</sup> March 1881, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ NWP, L/R/5/58, OIOC

<sup>238</sup> See Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5 Series, OIOC.

<sup>239</sup> Letters of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company, L/PWD/2 OIOC.

<sup>240</sup> Several travelogues mention the station establishment especially if the authors had to spend few hours at the stations or stayed overnight. See D. Ray, *Debganer Martye Agaman* (Calcutta, 1885); Ray, ‘Uttar-Paschim’.

adequately arranged to satisfy the needs and demands of the railway travellers.<sup>241</sup> Thus the logic behind introducing refreshment facilities was an odd mix of humanitarian gesture and economic common sense. But the provision had to be such as not to offend the religious and caste sensibilities of the Indian passengers. Of these, the supply of drinking water received earliest attention.<sup>242</sup> The EIRC made arrangements to supply drinking water at all stations on the line, and *bhistis* of different castes were employed to serve the water.<sup>243</sup> The EIRC board appreciated the measure and acknowledged the utility of the system especially in a climate like that of India. Half-yearly reports on the subject were demanded in order to learn how far the experiment had met the prejudice of the different castes. In the half-yearly inspection report of 1868, the EIRC agent assured the Board that the arrangements had received approval from the people judging by their acceptance of the service and their response appeared 'satisfactory.'<sup>244</sup> Broadly speaking, the railway companies employed high caste Hindus (usually Brahmins) and Muslims to provide drinking water at the railway stations to Hindu and Muslim passengers respectively. Some railway companies even managed to supply drinking water to the Brahmin passengers separately. The Ratlam-Godhra branch line employed Brahmin children to supply *Brahmanchya Paniya* exclusively to its Brahmin passengers.<sup>245</sup> Not all railway managements however followed such elaborate arrangements. The Madras railway company kept it rather simple. On the stations under the management of this company, drinking water was supplied through a pipe and a bucket was constantly filled up from this pipe. Passengers were expected to either drink directly from the pipe or to fill up their *lotas* from the bucket.<sup>246</sup> Even where measures to suit caste and religious sensibilities were introduced, 'native' passengers occasionally complained about the inadequacies in the arrangements. A newspaper report complained about inadequate arrangements for the supply of water to Muslim passengers on the SPDR line.<sup>247</sup> Though it acknowledged the presence of Hindu and Muslim *bhistis*, the latter were alleged to attend to the demands of Europeans, as a result of which Muslim passengers found it difficult to obtain water.

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<sup>241</sup> The Annual Railway reports to the Secretary of State for India and the 'Railway Letters' exchanged between the Board of Directors and the respective agents for the railway companies in India repeatedly stress this point.

<sup>242</sup> Letter to the Agent EIRC, dated August 1867, in Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/83, 1867, OIOC.

<sup>243</sup> Idem.

<sup>244</sup> Quarterly Inspection Report, EIRC, May 1868, in Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, 1868, OIOC.

<sup>245</sup> Gopalram, *Lanka Yatra ka Vivaran* (Kashi, 1885).

<sup>246</sup> Idem.

<sup>247</sup> 'Sadiq-ul-Akhbar', 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1880 in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/57, OIOC.

In the case of drinking water, adequate supply was as important as adherence to the religious and caste rules. In some stations in the NWP, the EIRC arranged for a piped water supply from the Ganges canal.<sup>248</sup> The EIRC's half-yearly report (1869) on the subject admitted that sometimes passengers travelling by the express trains did not receive any attention from the *bhistis* mainly because the amount of water stored was not satisfactory.<sup>249</sup> It noted that demands on *bhistis* especially during the summer months were more than could be met, and admitted instances of 'native' passengers travelling from station to station without being able to obtain water. Failure to supply adequate amount of water was noted as the 'worst feature' of the system. The report revealed a lack of water in reserve beyond one *ghurra* in several stations of the EIRC. To improve the situation it was proposed to employ two Hindu watermen at each station during the summer months (from 1<sup>st</sup> April to the end of September) and each station was supplied with 2-3 good sized *ghurras* to keep a reserve of water. The Board accepted the proposals. Though the company officials acknowledged the failure to supply adequate water, the imperfection of the existing system was also linked with the ways in which Hindus took water. It was noted in detail how Hindus squatted down on the platform, rinsed their *lotas* before filling and formed a kind of trough to their mouth with their two hands and drank water gently. This method was argued to take a longer time and hindered rapid service to maximum number of passengers.

At times government intervention was needed to ensure adequate supply of water. In a letter to the Government of Punjab, the sanitary commissioner of the province complained about the lack of water supply at the stations belonging to the Sindh, Punjab and Delhi Railway Company (hereafter SPDR).<sup>250</sup> The situation was aggravated as it was summer, and coincided with the Haridwar fair. The commissioner wrote: 'it was really painful to see the despair and sufferings of the people, whose thirst has become inflamed by the heat of the day and intensely crowded state of the carriages to a degree hardly endurable.' In response, the Government of India ordered quarterly inspection reports from the SPDR. Further, the agent of the company was advised against 'such disregard for the comfort of travellers.'<sup>251</sup> The travelogues also record few instances of inadequate water supply at the stations. On two

<sup>248</sup> The stations between Kanpur and Delhi benefitted from this scheme. Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/ 85, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>249</sup> 'Half-Yearly Report of the supply of drinking water to passengers on the EIR', July 1869, from J. Dyer, officiating travelling inspector to the Chairman of the Board of Agency, EIRC, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/47, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>250</sup> Letter from A.C. DeRenzy, sanitary commissioner, Punjab, dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1873 to the Secretary to the Government of Punjab, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/578, 1873, OIOC.

<sup>251</sup> Idem, Letter from Consulting Engineer to the Government of India for Guaranteed Railways to the Agent SPDR, dated 27<sup>th</sup> June 1873.

different occasions Bharatendu Harishchandra complained about lack of water supply. In the first instance, the novelist was travelling on the GIPR's line and a few of his co-passengers failed to get any water even after repeated demands.<sup>252</sup> In the second instance he criticised the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company for lack of drinking water in the stations on their line.<sup>253</sup> In this case, the absence of water supply was exacerbated by the ill-treatment of the passengers at the hands of the employees of the railway company.<sup>254</sup>

The arrangement of food for 'native' passengers was more complicated and developed in phases, well into the early twentieth century. Initially, no food was provided for Indian railway passengers. To offer food, it was argued, caste prejudices had to be adhered to. Food stalls also posed cleanliness issues. But long hours of waiting at the stations or tedious journeys necessitated the availability of food in transit. In 1864, the consulting engineer to the Government of NWP drew the attention of the railway companies' towards the issue. His inspection report of the railway stations between Allahabad and Agra noted that ample catering facility were provided for the European passengers who were numerically insignificant, while nothing existed for the 'natives' who constituted '999 out of 1000 railway passengers.'<sup>255</sup> The report argued that attending to an 'important matter like this' would be advantageous to the company, and increase the popularity of the railways. It pointed to the presence of 'natives' on the platforms selling confectionery from baskets to the third class passengers in the carriages. The railway companies were advised to fill this 'great want' and earn a reasonable profit. But for Indian railway passengers any facilities were likely to be inadequate since most of them were unwilling to have food at the refreshment rooms, largely because of religious and caste issues. Railway travel posed a threat to the established rules of commensality. The trick lay in travelling by the trains, while avoiding the pollution. Only westernised Indians were thought to patronise the refreshment rooms, and to a great extent this was the case. The dilemma faced by the average Indian railway passengers is captured in the contemporary travelogues. In 1860, Jagmohan Chakrabarty on his first railway trip to Rajmahal from Calcutta described his predicament when the train reached Burdwan station at mid-day; but did not halt long enough for him to walk to nearby *bazar* to buy food.<sup>256</sup> The author was left with the choice of eating at the refreshment room, but decided not to because

<sup>252</sup> B. Harishchandra, 'Jabalpur ki Yatra' in H. Sharma (ed) *Bharatendu Granthavali*, 3 Volumes (Benaras, 2000).

<sup>253</sup> Idem, 'Sarayupar Ki Yatra'.

<sup>254</sup> A woman water bearer swore at the passengers on being insisted to supply water.

<sup>255</sup> 'Inspection of railway stations', Note by the consulting Engineer to the Government of NWP, on the stations in the NWP between Allahabad and Agra, dated 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1864, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of NWP and Oudh, P/217/37, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>256</sup> J. Chakrabarty, 'My first railway to Rajmehal', *Mookerjee's Magazine*, 1:1, February, 1860. (Calcutta, 1861)

his 'too sensitive caste stood across the doorway.' Kashinath Mukhopadhyay, the author of another Bengali travelogue - also preferred non-railway food.<sup>257</sup> Faced with the choice of a place to eat, he decided to patronise a shop selling dry food, instead of cooked food available in and around the station (Burdwan). He noted the range of choices passengers made, by remarking that westernised baboos preferred English food, and went towards the refreshment room, while the rest went to shops selling a variety of victuals.

The petition submitted by the British Indian Association in 1866 complained about the lack of proper restaurants for the mass of native passengers.<sup>258</sup> It described an average railway journey as 'enforced starvation' for thousands of Hindus and Muslims. It proposed building of two separate enclosures at two ends of the principal stations for Hindu and Muslim passengers, for supply of food of all sorts, cooked and otherwise. The railway authorities were requested to place these restaurants in the hands of Muslim and high caste Hindu cooks, who would cater to their specific demands. Contracting out the rights of these restaurants was also suggested in case the railway companies were keen on higher profit. The petitioners argued that the Madras Government had already built *pukka serais* for 'natives' at different principal points at the Madras railway, and the NWP government was requested to do the same. For the railway companies, the solution lay in opening refreshment rooms catering to the needs of the passengers. In order to do so, care had to be taken to adhere to the caste and religious sensibilities of Indian passengers, which meant that the companies had to employ cooks from all possible castes. In some large stations separate refreshment rooms were built for Hindu and Muslim passengers, employing a Brahmin cook in the former, and a Muslim in the latter. This pattern was difficult to replicate especially in the smaller stations due to the capital expenditure involved; and also due to the lukewarm response of the 'native' passengers to the existing refreshment rooms. Despite employing Brahmins the food available in the refreshment rooms remained suspect. The railway companies' claim of employing Brahmin cooks was thought to be dubious at best, and most of the 'native' passengers were averse to accept food cooked by someone whose caste status was unknown.

One solution lay in offering two long halts to passenger trains to let 'native' passengers cook their own food.<sup>259</sup> It was also financially agreeable as it involved very little or no capital outlay. In 1869, a Bengali businessman, Nil Kamal Mitra, proposed to construct refreshment rooms for Indian passengers at several railway stations along the EIR line

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<sup>257</sup> K. Mukhopadhyay, *Railway Companion* (Calcutta, 1863).

<sup>258</sup> See footnote 12.

<sup>259</sup> See chapter two.

especially at Burdwan, Sahebganj, Danapur and Kanpur.<sup>260</sup> He wanted to enter into an agreement for the hire of the refreshment rooms for 'natives', and offered to undertake the management of the existing native refreshment rooms by providing all the necessary requirements of Indian passengers. The EIRC accepted the proposal and it was resolved to let Mitra to build rent-free, refreshment rooms at stations along the line. In addition, the EIRC decided to supply food (mainly dry), milk, fruits and sweets at the platforms through 'native' vendors.<sup>261</sup> Cards written in English and in the languages of the district were suspended from the neck of the vendors with details of the food and the price at which it was available. To attract passengers, the price was kept low, especially as 'native' food stalls around the stations offered stiff competition. The idea of mobile vendors caught on, and eventually shouts of food vendors became a ubiquitous symbol of the railway stations. Most railway companies followed the EIRC pattern, and sold rights to sell food on the station platforms to 'native' contractors.<sup>262</sup> The arrangement was liable to abuse and usually contracts were given to those who offered better revenue sharing deals to the companies. This meant passengers paying higher price for obtaining low quality, stale and unwholesome food. As a result many passengers still had to rely on food sold outside the stations or had to carry their own.

The newspapers were replete with grievance against the catering arrangements for 'native' passengers on the railways. In particular frequent complaints were made against the contract system. At most stations vendors had to pay a fee of 10 or 25 rupees to the railway company for permission to operate. To recover this amount they overcharged customers, and sold low quality food.<sup>263</sup> The system was certainly unequal as the Europeans who kept refreshment rooms paid no license fees to the railway authorities. But the confirmation of a link between fees and poor food was implied when the contract entered into with Nil Kamal Mitra lasted only for five years and was not renewed.<sup>264</sup> The EIRC was alleged to have made 'certain demands' which, if complied with, would have led to serious financial loss for Mitra, so that he was forced to close his refreshment rooms. On the other hand, a report from 1886 noted the right to sell food at the Lahore station for the following year went to a trader who offered to pay 2000 rupees to the railway company instead of the earlier license holder who

<sup>260</sup> 'Proposal to construct waiting and refreshment rooms for natives', Letter from Baboo Nil Comul Mitter of Allahabad, dated 14<sup>th</sup> May 1869, to the Lieutenant Governor, NWP, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/44, OIOC.

<sup>261</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/91, 1875, OIOC.

<sup>262</sup> 'Refreshment rooms for native passengers', extract from minutes of the meeting, dated 8<sup>th</sup> July 1870, in Proceedings of Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/49, OIOC. One reason for the EIRC's acceptance of Nil Kamal Mitra's proposals was his impeccable reference' from Lieutenant Governor, NWP.

<sup>263</sup> 'Koh-i-Nur', 15<sup>th</sup> July 1871 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/48, OIOC.

<sup>264</sup> 'Bharat Sangskarak', 19<sup>th</sup> February 1875, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' Bengal, L/R/5/1, OIOC.

paid 300 rupees.<sup>265</sup> The railway companies preferred this arrangement as they had no liability regarding the quality of food and were content to earn profit without responsibility. Further, it was claimed that 'natives' were most eligible to offer food to their compatriots, keeping the religious and caste norms intact.

Complaints against corruption in issuing contracts for food supply became so rife that the NWP government had to intervene. It abolished the system of granting license to traders at stations on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway and empowered one Hindu and one Muslim manager to supply refreshments to Indian passengers.<sup>266</sup> The solution however did not produce desired results as these managers were accused of selling food at even higher rate than the vendors. One newspaper sarcastically commented 'the remedy has proved worse than the disease.'<sup>267</sup> By the turn of the century the issue also acquired a distinct political character.<sup>268</sup> The railway authorities were blamed for being intentionally disregarding of the needs of the 'native' passengers and encouraging European enterprise at the cost of Indian traders. A range of solutions was suggested to improve the situation which included consulting 'leading Indian gentlemen' and regular inspection of the existing food stalls.<sup>269</sup> Eventually in 1902, Lord Curzon issued a circular that 'Hindu restaurants' should be opened at the principal stations, discontinuing the practice of selling licenses to food vendors on the railway platforms.<sup>270</sup> Indians were invited by several railway managements (beginning with the GIPR) to open hotels in the stations on contractual basis.<sup>271</sup> These hotels were to operate under the railway management. This measure was expected to ensure better quality food and keep prices under check.

The arrangements for refreshments at the stations underline the link between the success of railway enterprise and the response to passenger demands. As the report by the consulting engineer to the NWP government claimed, the numbers could be ignored only at the risk of jeopardising profit. In addition, the railway companies were also aware of the peculiarities of the Indian conditions. By employing water suppliers of different castes, or

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<sup>265</sup> 'Khair Khwah -i-Kashmir', 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1866, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/63; also 'Samay', 7<sup>th</sup> September 1894, Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/21, OIOC.

<sup>266</sup> Minutes of the meeting resolving Messrs Chunni Lal and Muhammad Husain given the responsibility of supplying refreshment to native passengers', dated 24<sup>th</sup> November 1899, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/ 1386, OIOC.

<sup>267</sup> 'Jami-ul-Ulum' 14<sup>th</sup> April 1900, 'Selection from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/77, OIOC

<sup>268</sup> The shift can partly be explained by rise of anti-colonial movement and passing over the railway management in the hands of the Government.

<sup>269</sup> 'Indian Mirror' 18<sup>th</sup> January 1908 in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' Bengal' L/R/5/35 and 'Hindustan' 29<sup>th</sup> April 1907, 'Selection from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/81, OIOC.

<sup>270</sup> Railway Circular Number 13 in Proceedings of the Railway Conference, 1902, Simla, 25/720/32, OIOC

<sup>271</sup> 'Hitavadi' 18<sup>th</sup> July 1902, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' Bengal, L/R/5/28, OIOC.



hiring Brahmin cooks, they sought to attract Indian passengers by offering services commensurate with their specific caste or religious needs. The petitions and the newspaper reports make it plain that Indian passengers, too, knew their importance, and made demands for improvements on that basis. Accordingly, rising passenger complaints against the cost of food sold on the platforms led the traffic superintendent of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway to institute an enquiry, and the rates were fixed at par with those of local market.<sup>272</sup> Such responses were influenced by the knowledge that ‘native’ passengers were not dependent on the railway companies for provision of these facilities; passengers regularly patronised the food shops right outside the railway stations selling fresher food at cheaper price. Such competition might jeopardise the companies’ financial prospects.

Interestingly, in the demands made by passengers, two distinct concerns, though at times overlapping, can be identified. One set of demands emphasised the numerical and pecuniary significance of Indian passengers, and claimed proportionate services. For instance, a newspaper report urged the railway companies to attend to the comforts of Indian passengers because they were the source of the ‘lion’s share of the railway revenue.’<sup>273</sup> The second set of demands focused on the faults in the existing arrangements, which were argued to violate established caste and religious taboos. The *Oudh Akhbar* reported two such instances of disregard shown by the railway companies to Hindu and Muslim sensibilities.<sup>274</sup> In the first case, a cup was used (without washing) to give water to a Muslim passenger after European had used it; and in the second, a Hindu *bhisti* did not clean the vessel from which a Bengali passenger had drunk, and put the vessel back into the bucket of water. The report concluded by noting: ‘such things are opposed to the prejudices of Hindus and Mussulmans. The railway officials should exercise a check over the water carriers in this matter.’ Usually such complaints were promptly redressed, in the favour of passengers. In one such, the passengers complained against the contractor in charge of the food stall at Burdwan station, who was allegedly non-Brahmin, and therefore could not offer cooked food. The EIRC responded to the crisis by issuing additional contracts to four Brahmins to meet the passenger demands.<sup>275</sup> This negotiation between the railway companies and Indian passengers challenge the hitherto held idea of railway policies being impervious to the needs and demands of Indian society. More importantly perhaps, this interaction is suggestive of

<sup>272</sup> ‘Naiyar-i-Azam’ 19<sup>th</sup> February 1901, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/78, OIOC

<sup>273</sup> ‘Hindustan’ 29<sup>th</sup> April 1907, ‘Selection from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/81, OIOC.

<sup>274</sup> ‘Oudh Akhbar’, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1880, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/57, OIOC.

<sup>275</sup> ‘Education Gazette’, 13<sup>th</sup> June 1890, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/16, OIOC.

framing matters associated with railway travel in terms of identity, implications of which will be analysed in subsequent chapters.

The imperative to attract passenger traffic also influenced the decision to construct *serais* in and around the stations. As timetables became more complicated, passengers were forced to spend nights at the stations. This necessitated the provision of resting places especially at the large stations. And absence of such provision near the railway stations for 'native' travellers was thought to have an adverse effect on the numbers who would choose to travel by railways. But in the case of EIRC, it was also prompted by a desire to claim a responsibility which hitherto had been (mostly) a preserve of the ruler.<sup>276</sup> The EIRC board admitted: 'hitherto the Government of India provided *serais* and dak bungalows at convenient distances on all the principal roads. Since the railway company had succeeded to the rights of the Government as proprietors of the chief roads, they had inherited the acknowledged obligation and are bound to provide suitable resting places for the travellers.'<sup>277</sup> An anonymous petition to the Viceroy underlined this need by listing the 'inconveniences' suffered by the passengers if they chose to travel by rail. The list included: the absence of *serais* adjacent to stations for the travellers to rest at night, lack of wells from which travellers could drink water, and absence of *puraos* or plain close to the stations where travellers might cook their meals.<sup>278</sup> The petitioner suggested some improvements to be made, as has been done on the roads for the comfort of the people.

In 1865 the EIRC sanctioned the construction of *serais* at the stations at intervals of about 100 miles, and dak bungalows at intervals of 150 to 200 miles.<sup>279</sup> In addition, *serais* with wells were provided at some large stations by securing funds from private subscription or local or district funds in absence of any aid from the imperial funds.<sup>280</sup> The company also offered contracts to build resting rooms for 'respectable natives', at different stations, and offered plots of land in the vicinity of the railway stations.<sup>281</sup> Sometimes buildings were constructed with the intention of renting them out as resting places for Indian passengers. In one such instance, the EIRC built a *pukka* building at the Mokameh station and rented it out

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<sup>276</sup> Constructing resting places for travellers was usually a royal prerogative and the practice has a long lineage. See J. Deloche, *Transport and Communication in India Prior to Steam Locomotion*, Volume 1 (Delhi, 1993)

<sup>277</sup> Memorandum on Report of the Sanitary Commissioner, Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/81, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>278</sup> Translation of an anonymous petition, dated 24<sup>th</sup> February 1865, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/35, OIOC.

<sup>279</sup> Letter to the Agent EIRC dated 15<sup>th</sup> September 1865, in letters of EIRC, L/R/5/81, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>280</sup> Resolution by the Government of India, PWD, Circular Number 22, dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 1866 in 'Miscellany Railway Letters', L/PWD/2/190 [1865-67], OIOC.

<sup>281</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/93, 1877, OIOC.

for five rupees per month to an Indian contractor.<sup>282</sup> Apart from principal stations, in most cases the construction of resting houses did not require much capital outlay because the company entered into agreements with the existing *serais* and *dharamsalas*.<sup>283</sup> The railway companies were advised against undertaking direct responsibility for providing hotel accommodation for Indian passengers. It was thought that circumstances in India would make any satisfactory return upon the outlay doubtful.<sup>284</sup>

Some travelogues offer an interesting and complex picture of the working of railway *serais*. Kedar Nath Das recorded his stay in a *serai* near Aurangabad station as a 'nightmare', since the place also doubled as a stable for horses.<sup>285</sup> Surendranath Ray had a more mixed experience. The author was travelling through the NWP, and on several occasions stayed in *dharamsalas* and *serais* at Benaras, Allahabad, Etawah and Agra.<sup>286</sup> Of these, the *serai* at Benaras was worst, as the mud walled rooms lacked ventilation, the courtyard was shared by stray animals, and the attendants were nowhere to be seen. He warned prospective travellers against staying there, even if it meant that they stayed out in the open. At Etawah, the *serai* was quite similar to the one in Benaras. In contrast, the *dharamsala* in Allahabad, and the *serai* at Agra were excellent, with well-lit, clean and spacious rooms, and the attendants were ready to serve. Surendranath Ray's experience was typical. The problem lay in contracting out the establishments without any control on their management. Passengers often demanded that the railway companies should either build rest houses of their own, or intervene in the management of the *serais* built around the railway stations. The *Dacca Prakash* asked the government and the EBR to construct accommodation near Sealdah station for visitors from outside Calcutta.<sup>287</sup> It noted the want of a resting place in the metropolis as the chief reason for many people not visiting it, and assured the EBR of increased revenue receipts if it met those needs.

The railway companies' response was mainly guided by financial concerns and other issues such as amount of passenger traffic, and the length of the line. Smaller lines like the SPDR were constantly criticised for not following the EIR pattern of building some resting

<sup>282</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/91, 1875, OIOC.

<sup>283</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>284</sup> Despatch to the Government of Bombay by Sir Charles Wood, dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 1860, in 'Miscellany Railway Letters' L/PWD/2/191 [1868-69]. Though some exceptions were made to the rule when the Calcutta and South-Eastern Railway Company built a hotel at their terminal station in Port Canning

<sup>285</sup> K.N. Das, *Bharatbarsher Pratichi Digvihar* (Murshidabad, 1872).

<sup>286</sup> S.N. Ray, *Uttar-Paschim Bhraman* (Calcutta, 1907).

<sup>287</sup> 'Dacca Prakash' 8<sup>th</sup> May 1887, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/13; for a similar report see 'Sulabha Samachar' 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1877, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/3, OIOC.

establishments for passengers in the stations. The company was even advised to solicit financial assistance from the chiefs of the Native States lying near the stations to construct adequate facilities for passengers.<sup>288</sup> As its network expanded, the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company decided to build retiring rooms for third class passengers and the move was ‘heartily welcomed’ by the those who have been suffering from its absence.<sup>289</sup> Seen against the backdrop of the foregoing discussions, the railway companies’ decision to construct and maintain *serais* for the third class passengers is not surprising. This assumption of responsibility, though limited and commercially motivated, did lead to introduction of certain measures which improved the station establishment. The railway companies were certainly not eager to make elaborate arrangements for this class of traffic. But it was imperative to offer certain facilities so as to not discourage ‘native’ passengers away from the railway network. Therefore a system of contracting out services was chosen which ensured minimum liability with maximum profit.

These amenities were increasingly used as ‘public provisions’ which is suggestive of a shift from personal or private transactions to a commercial system accessible to anyone. Earlier travellers had to rely on either on piety of rulers or individuals or on kinship network for boarding and stay. In the increasing demand for establishments near the stations, one can identify a definite move towards wider use of ‘public provisions’ detached from social or communal obligations. But the process was gradual, which may have been a result of commercialisation and caste or religious prohibitions. The railway contracts added a commercial and speculative element in the management of *serais* and passengers had to pay standardised rates to use these facilities. Moreover, being open to anyone who could pay, these places threatened rules of pollution. The ambiguities of the process was captured well by Jagmohan Chakrabarty, when he decided against staying in a railway hotel and declared the decision causing a loss of potential member to the Young Bengal movement.<sup>290</sup> The travelogues reflect this transition well, as most authors combined a stay in railway establishments for a short duration, and relied on kinship networks for longer stay.

In many ways this private/public shift too are indicative of the changes noted earlier, that of railway-specific collective experiences as something new, and by nature raising issues for ‘traditional’ forms of identity and association. As the foregoing discussion on food, drinking water, and accommodation arrangements for Indian railway passengers suggests,

<sup>288</sup> ‘Majma-ul-Bahrain’, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1872, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ NWP, L/R/5/49, OIOC.

<sup>289</sup> ‘Oudh Akhbar’, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1884, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/61, OIOC.

<sup>290</sup> Chakrabarty, ‘Railway’.

there were some ways in which the collective identities ('native' passengers) enforced by railways had to override existing differences and conventions of association. In other ways, for instance, while making separate arrangements for drinking water for Brahmins and Hindu and Muslim passengers, the railway had to accommodate these differences and conventions, though largely for pecuniary purposes. Railways therefore, it can be argued, provided a new site for these old differences, but also posed the issues in particularly stark ways. For instance, in a village commensality was not a problem as awkwardness would seldom arise; on a railway journey one was forced to take active decisions as illustrated by Jagmohan Chakrabarty or Kashinath Mukhopadhyay. As argued in the previous chapter, here again it can be noted that at one level railways enforced collective identities, which were also contested (complaints about bhistis or non-Brahmin cooks). Such changes therefore provide occasions for assessing social impact, which would be considered in chapter seven.

## II

This section focuses on the railway carriage as a new site to which passengers had to adapt. The dynamics of this process played a critical role in shaping passengers' railway experiences, as they had to adapt to the physical and the social dimension of the railway carriage.<sup>291</sup> This is not to suggest that other modes of transport did not necessitate adjusting to either of these dimensions. But the railway carriage was certainly a novelty. For the first time passengers travelled in a speed hitherto inexperienced, while being confined in an enclosed compartment with a fairly large group of usually unknown people. Hitherto third class railway carriage have drawn sustained attention from contemporary commentators and later day historians alike. These accounts mainly focus on the conditions under which passengers travelled, and identified them as symptomatic of a railway operating within a colonial context. Useful as these are, they overlook the significance of the railway carriage as a site where 'native' passengers faced a new setting, producing new demands that were negotiated with varying amount of success. Adjustment to the railway carriage happened in several stages. Initially, passengers had to sit in close proximity while making space for their luggage. As the train gathered speed they had to adjust to the movement. This was considered to be an admirable skill and an early Bengali tract advised people to avoid standing while the

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<sup>291</sup> By physical dimension I mean the facilities in the carriages, i.e. benches, luggage-space, toilets etc.; and social refers to presence of people.

train was on the move.<sup>292</sup> Unlike Europe, very little information is available about Indian railway passengers' experience of bodily adjustment to the demands of the moving railway carriage.<sup>293</sup> On his first railway journey Rabindranath Tagore felt 'cheated' by not experiencing any jolt, or physical sensation when the train began to move.<sup>294</sup> The poet's experience however, should not be applied to the bulk of Indian passengers as he travelled in the first class with cushioned berths which absorbed the shock of the movement.<sup>295</sup>

The third class carriages often lacked seats, although the EIRC carriages were fitted with benches.<sup>296</sup> The EBRC decided to follow the EIRC, and third class carriages with benches were introduced once the line became operational in 1862.<sup>297</sup> However there was a debate over the provision of benches in the carriages. It centred on a 'native' idea of comfort while in transit. Indians were argued to prefer to travel in seat-less carriages. This preference was said to be derived from the 'native' habit of sitting in the same manner in their homes, and it was thought that sitting on benches for hours would thus be alien and unappealing. Moreover, provision of seats implied additional cost of the rolling stock and the railway companies were reluctant to introduce changes which were not likely to be popular. Accordingly, in 1864, the EBR decided to conform to such 'native ideas of comfort' and removed seats from its third class carriages. This was followed by an introduction of seat-less fourth class carriages, also known as the 'coolie' carriages.<sup>298</sup> The re-arrangement also affected the fare structure, and the fourth class passengers were now being carried at the previous third class rate.

However, the official idea of 'native comfort' was not welcomed by its target audience. Indian passengers, especially daily commuters who travelled to Calcutta for office jobs, resented the modification. The debate generated by this measure is worth looking at as it brings out the interplay between price paid, facilities provided, and ideas of social respectability. A group of daily commuters submitted a petition to the Government of Bengal, complaining about the EBRC's decision to remove seats and argued the measure being

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<sup>292</sup> Dutt, 'Bashpiya'.

<sup>293</sup> Schivelbusch, 'The railway'.

<sup>294</sup> Tagore, 'Jeevan'.

<sup>295</sup> This is perhaps the reason why travelogues are also silent on this issue.

<sup>296</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/80, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>297</sup> Letters from EBRC, L/PWD/2/156, 1859-1862, OIOC.

<sup>298</sup> 'Successful introduction of a 4<sup>th</sup> class on Eastern Bengal Railway' letter from F. Prestage, Agent, EBRC to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, Railway Department, dated 10<sup>th</sup> June 1864 in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/32, OIOC.

detrimental to their health.<sup>299</sup> The petitioners described themselves as ‘middle class’ and noted:

The EBR traverses through a part of the country which is comparatively poor; the majority of the people pay even third class fares not without some difficulty, but they are willing to bear the increased expense, compared to what they used to incur by passage by boats, for the sake of speedy transit, and it cannot be just, we submit, to deny the passengers by this rail the convenience and comfort which are commonly enjoyed by the passengers of the same class by other railways, who also pay equal fares per mile. We accordingly request His Honour [the Lieutenant Governor] may be pleased to take the above circumstance into consideration, and order the restoration of seats of the third class carriages of the EBR.

The Government of Bengal declined to interfere with the decision of the company. In a reply to the petitioners, Captain Taylor, the Joint Secretary to the Government of Bengal, made a clear case for facilities provided in accordance to the fare structure. He argued, if the petitioners were indeed middle class, then the matter was in their own hands, as they could travel in second class at a moderate rate. He concluded by noting: ‘those who desire to travel comfortably can do so at an extremely moderate price; while those who prefer their money to their comfort and choose to travel in carriages intended for the poor must be content with suitable accommodation.’ But eventually the company decided to re-introduce seats in few third class carriages, while keeping the rest without any seats. The debate was not much about the advantages or disadvantages of travelling in seat-less carriages; but converged on whether the amount of money spent could justify the amenities provided. By linking provision of facilities to individual ability to spend, the issue was divorced from any humanitarian concern while framing it as a commercial exchange. Nonetheless, it is evident that was pressure for change, to which the railway company made a partial response. In an interesting parallel, the manager of the Calcutta and South-Eastern State Railway informed the Railway Conference that if fare remained the same, ‘native’ passengers preferred to travel in third class carriages with seats instead of the fourth class ones.<sup>300</sup> He noted the majority of the passengers who chose carriages with seats were ‘baboo’s, and added: ‘the baboo must ride in a carriage with seats, as he wishes to keep his clothes clean.’ The seat-less carriages, he argued were usually used by passengers, who were either of very low caste or railway servants, the latter being restricted to that carriage.

The issue was therefore both economic and social. Travelling in an upper class railway carriage had acquired a symbolic significance and was a critical component in issues

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<sup>299</sup> Petition from third class passengers of the EBRC to the Joint Secretary, to the Government of Bengal, PWD, Railway Branch, dated 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1864, Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/32, OIOC.

<sup>300</sup> Note by Captain F. Firebrace, Manager of the Calcutta and South-Eastern State Railway, on the passenger traffic of the line, in Proceedings of the Railway Conference, 1871, V/25/720/27, OIOC.

of identity. It seems the condition of the lower class carriages was expected to be worse; but, more importantly, they were considered good enough for some people. It was no coincidence that the 'middle-class' petitioners did not clamour for seats in the fourth class carriages or against the way in which passengers travelled in the 'coolie' carriages. In a striking display of attitudes to issues of travel and class, Bharatendu Harishchandra thought the third class carriages of the GIPR must be used only by 'coolies or similar low class' people because they were in a wretched condition.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, once forced to travel in the second class (on the EIRC), the novelist was disappointed by the state of the carriage and suggested improvements, which included, among other things, using the decrepit carriages to carry third class passengers.<sup>302</sup>

Seating arrangements were closely related to the amount of space available in the carriages. Passengers had to adapt to the forced confinement of the railway carriage, and it was necessary to have adequate space to feel comfortable. The lower class passengers were usually denied this comfort because the carriages were indiscriminately filled disregarding basic needs of the passengers. In these carriages over-crowding was the norm and it was a constant source of passenger grievances. As early as 1859, complaints against the EIRC's practice of packing third class carriages became so frequent as to prompt the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to ask the company to redress the matter.<sup>303</sup> The ensuing investigation revealed a width of 15 ½ inch was allowed as 'sitting room' per passenger, and the company admitted that the space was 'certainly much too scanty for passenger of any class.' The Government increased it to 20 inches per person, and the number of passengers was fixed at 5 per bench. These measures did little to alleviate the sufferings of passengers because lower class carriages were filled to maximise revenue. Station masters and the railway police constables were supposed to prevent over-crowding; more often than not they forcefully pushed passengers into the already filled carriages.<sup>304</sup>

The plight of third class passengers at the hands of the railway employees is graphically described in *Hutom Penchar Naksha*.<sup>305</sup> In his characteristic witty style, the author noted the various ways in which railway guards and two constables of the railway

<sup>301</sup> He used the word *shreni*; the exact English equivalent is class. B. Harishchandra, *Jabalpur Ki Yatra* in H. Sharma (ed) Bharatendu Granthavali, 3 volumes (Benaras, 2000).

<sup>302</sup> Idem, *Baidyanath Ki Yatra*; other suggestions included auctioning the carriages or to put them on fire. Bharatendu's opinion was not unique, similar ideas were routinely expressed in the Indian languages newspapers.

<sup>303</sup> General Report of the Administration of the several Presidencies and Provinces of British India during the year 1859-60, V/10/11, OIOC.

<sup>304</sup> See Proceedings of the Judicial and Police Department, Government of Bengal, OIOC.

<sup>305</sup> Sinha, 'Hutom'.



police were filling in the third class carriages, ‘disregardful of the passengers’ pitiful cry, making each of the third class carriage resemble the womb of a giant crab.’ He sarcastically commented: ‘if by chance those Englishmen who survived the Black Hole of Calcutta were to see today the plight of the third class passengers, they would have admitted their suffering as less than these passengers.’ Over-crowding was also a characteristic feature of the local trains. A Bengali tract explained the anxiety of the daily commuters for catching a train at a particular time mainly in terms of overcrowding.<sup>306</sup> On occasions of religious festivals and *melas*, over-crowding became worse. The EIRC line passed through several important pilgrim centres which attracted steady flow of people around the year; but during special religious events millions assembled in particular places. When faced with such demands, the usual response of the EIRC was to attach goods wagons to the existing passenger trains and to pack them to the fullest extent possible. Being good wagons, the carriages lacked seats, were filthy and often without roofs to cover passengers from sun and rain.

Complaints against over-crowding came from every quarter. An anonymous letter to the editor of the *Englishman* described the way third class carriages were packed as ‘disgraceful’ as the guards freely used threats and blows and treated third class travellers ‘worse than brute beasts.’<sup>307</sup> In a letter to the Agent of the EIRC, the Officiating Commissioner of the Agra division laid bare the link between the civil treatment of passengers and company’s ability to attract passengers. He wrote: ‘it is impossible for any traveller to pass over the line without being struck with the gross want of consideration and courtesy with which the masses of the people who occupy the third class carriages, and whom the company at present mainly dependent for their dividends, are treated by the railway officials European and natives.’<sup>308</sup> It added, in case the company failed in controlling its servants, then potential travellers would not hesitate to use slower modes of transport because the railway would mean inconvenience and insult. The NWP government called upon an ‘immediate and sweeping reform’, before the railway became ‘generally unpopular’, and wanted the subordinate railway employees to realise the necessity of treating their most important constituents, the third class passengers, with common civility and kindness. The government agencies recommended several measures to deal with the issue including: fixing

<sup>306</sup> Azim-ul-din, *Ki majar kaler gadi* (Burdwan, 1863).

<sup>307</sup> ‘Railway Delinquencies’, Letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1863 to the editor of the ‘Englishman’, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/30, 1863, OIOC.

<sup>308</sup> ‘Treatment of passengers on the EIR, NWP,’ December 1863, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of NWP and Oudh, P/217/33, 1863, OIOC.

the number of passengers allowed to seat in each bench, and painting outside and within the carriage (in vernacular) the maximum number of passengers to be seated per carriage.

Despite government intervention and remonstrance, the railway companies continued to pack carriages with more passengers than they were allowed. In response to any criticism directed at over-crowding, 'native' passenger behaviour was held responsible. Indian passengers were argued to want to travel in groups, and to resist attempts to break away from the group even if it entailed travelling in crowded carriages. Reacting to the Government of NWP's proposal to fix number of persons to be put inside each carriage, the deputy Agent of EIRC noted that the number was fixed years ago, but the 'greatest difficulty' faced by the company was to keep passengers out because of 'their tendency to flock like sheep in one carriage and the disinclination to enter an empty carriage.'<sup>309</sup> One railway official even admitted an instance of permitting abusive behaviour against 'native' passengers, when they obstinately refused to leave an over-crowded carriage to enter an empty one.<sup>310</sup> On his inspection tour of the Indian railways, J. L. Danvers noticed over-crowding; but thought it was 'unavoidable' since 'native' passengers carried innumerable bundles, and travelled with many children who were squeezed hurriedly through the openings of the third class carriages.<sup>311</sup> At times complaints of over-crowding were summarily dismissed as an exaggeration.<sup>312</sup> On other occasions like religious festivals, over-crowding was admitted but the blame was put on 'natives' since they wanted to be carried by rail to the same spot at the same time. Apart from blaming 'native peculiarities', the railway companies also cited lack of sufficient rolling stock for over-crowding especially during religious occasions. This claim however was usually rejected by the government agencies because it was easy to know the Hindu religious calendar in advance, and if additional trains had been run before these dates then the problem would not have occurred.<sup>313</sup>

Passengers travelling in the lower class carriages had to also adapt to lack of lighting and toilet facilities. Of these, the former was introduced much earlier. Lighting third class carriages with oil lamps was introduced in the Bengal division of the EIR in 1865.<sup>314</sup> In the

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<sup>309</sup> Idem; reply from the Deputy Agent, EIRC to the Government of NWP, letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> December 1863.

<sup>310</sup> Inspection report of the EIR by Major J. Hovendon, for the first quarter of 1865, dated 12<sup>th</sup> April 1865, Calcutta, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/35, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>311</sup> See footnote three.

<sup>312</sup> Note by Major Hovendon, Deputy Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1865, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/35, 1865, OIOC.

<sup>313</sup> Letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> January 1871 from W. Oldham, Collector of Ghazipur to the Commissioner, 5<sup>th</sup> Division, Benaras, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/264, 1871, OIOC.

<sup>314</sup> Note by Captain F.S. Taylor, Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, Inspection Report of the EIRC for the second quarter of the year 1866, in 'Miscellany Railway Letters', L/PWD/2/190 [1865-67], OIOC.

same year a petition from to the Viceroy requested the introduction of lights in the carriages of the upper division.<sup>315</sup> The petitioner was aggrieved by the apparent lack of concern for the railway passengers of the NWP, and argued that, if financial concerns were keeping the EIRC away from implementing the measure in the province, then they should not be much concerned as oil worth four *annas* was enough for a lamp to burn through the whole night. The arrangement, it was claimed, would cost the company only five or six rupees to light ten or twelve carriages, the profit it made from a few passengers so that could therefore forego the amount to provide a minimum of comfort. Next year (1866) oil lamps were introduced on the NWP section of the EIR line. The system however was not without defects and the most frequent complaint was the dimness of the lamps which was mainly because lamps were imperfectly cleaned. In a letter to the traffic manager of the company, the Chairman of the Board of the EIRC noted the problem was due to lack of good *furrush* and admitted that the ordinary coolies who cleaned the carriage lamps could not do the job well.<sup>316</sup> The Board recommended appointment of *furrush* and mid-night lamp stations where lamps will be changed. Another problem was that the lamps did not burn through the night.<sup>317</sup> In response, the company agreed but noted, that the carriages with bad lamps were borrowed from the GIPR, and therefore more liable to be improperly trimmed than the EIRC ones. By the late 1870s the EIRC also introduced gas lighting in the carriages and the measure was welcomed by passengers.<sup>318</sup> However, progress was not uniform. Even in 1892, a newspaper report criticised other railway companies in failing to follow the EIRC example.<sup>319</sup> Finally the EIRC proposed to light railway carriages with electric lamps in 1887. The suggestion received lukewarm response. Newspaper reports welcomed the move and supported the company's desire to control cost; but the measure was also argued to be detrimental for sleeping due to the effects of a strong light on the eyes.<sup>320</sup> Another report noted that electric lamps could 'cause mischief', by showing clearly the position of women in the carriages.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> 'Petition from a frequent traveller by rail' to the Honourable the Viceroy and Governor General in Council, Cawnpore, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1865, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/163/36, (July-December) 1865, OIOC.

<sup>316</sup> Letter from Cecil Stephenson, Chairman, Board of Agency, EIRC to the Traffic Manager, EIR, Jamalpur, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1869, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/46, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>317</sup> Extract from a report in Native Paper on imperfect lighting of third class carriages on the EIR in the Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/265, 1871, OIOC.

<sup>318</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/91, 1878, OIOC.

<sup>319</sup> 'Hindustan' 15<sup>th</sup> July 1892, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/69, OIOC.

<sup>320</sup> 'Som Prakash', 7<sup>th</sup> May 1887, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/13, OIOC.

<sup>321</sup> 'Sahachar' 9<sup>th</sup> May 1887, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/13, OIOC.

Unlike lighting, passengers had to bear the absence of toilet facilities in the carriages right up to the early twentieth century. Providing latrine arrangements in all carriages necessitated improvement in the existing rolling-stock, which entailed increased expenditure that the railway companies were certainly not ready for. But they were unwilling to admit it, blaming instead ‘native habits’. Indians were said to leave the toilets dirty. Further, if toilets were to be provided in the carriages, then the companies would have to employ *mehters* on each train. Even this, it was argued, might prove inadequate as ‘natives’ lacked a basic sense of hygiene. There would be a need for an ‘army of *mehters*’ to keep the facilities useable. Further, ‘natives’ were claimed to answer the calls of nature at regulated hours of the day (in the morning) and Hindus especially were said to be appalled at the idea of travelling in a compartment with toilets inside. Instead it was decided to provide two halts in the train schedule to offer ‘native’ passengers an hour and a half to answer calls of nature, wash and cook food in their own manner.<sup>322</sup> Besides two long halts, a few halts of shorter duration were provided to the passenger trains for ‘natives’ to relieve themselves.

‘Native’ passengers were certainly not happy with the arrangement. Though the long halts were appreciated, the lack of toilets in the carriages was not. In their absence, passengers were forced to relieve themselves by opening the carriage doors of the moving trains, and that often proved fatal. Accidents from such cases became frequent enough to draw the government’s attention. A letter to the Government of Bengal noted: ‘during the five months from August to December 1879 no less than five accidents of the nature referred to were reported to this government as having occurred on the EIRC and on the EBR. In the last case which occurred on the EBR, the passenger who was travelling in a fourth class carriage, was so severely injured that he died.’<sup>323</sup> Passenger complaints against lack of privies were very frequent. G.N. Kane, a third class passenger submitted a petition to the Viceroy about the ‘great hardship’ endured by the third class passengers on the GIPR by the absence of all accommodation to answer calls of nature.<sup>324</sup> In reply Kane was informed that the subject had occupied attention of the Public Works Department for many years; but owing to the ‘negligent habits’ of the majority of passengers travelling in the third class carriages it was difficult to reach any decision. And in case latrines were to be provided, the Government

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<sup>322</sup> See chapter two.

<sup>323</sup> Letter from H.M. Kitsch, Undersecretary to the GOB, to the Consulting Engineer to the GOI for Guaranteed Railways, dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 1880, in Proceedings from Judicial and Police Department, GOB, P/1491, 1880, OIOC; also Police Administration Report, NWP, 1886, in V/24/3171 (1886-1890) OIOC.

<sup>324</sup> Petition from G.N. Kane, a third class passenger to the Viceroy of India, dated 25<sup>th</sup> May 1893, Mahabaleshwar, in Proceedings of the Railway Conference, V/25/720/29, OIOC.

thought they might prove a 'positive nuisance' to travellers.<sup>325</sup> A newspaper article complained about the difficulties faced by the third class passengers, especially by *pardanashin* women.<sup>326</sup> In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, after sustained demands, toilet facilities were introduced in the lower class carriages.<sup>327</sup>

The foregoing discussion is suggestive of a process of interaction between 'native' passengers, and the railway authorities. The railway companies were in need of steady 'native' passenger traffic, and for Indians the railway offered speedier, and relatively comfortable transit. This process, though asymmetrical, was therefore based on an awareness of mutual dependence. Whether over the seating arrangements, lighting or toilets, demands for improvement and responses to these pressures were marked by this awareness. Further, new situation (railway carriage), gave rise to new expectations (berths, lights and toilets in carriages) about standards. These were certainly coloured by class and other previous attitudes and customs, but often companies cited these as mere excuse for poor provision. Passengers could also be conservative in their attitudes, but mostly they soon adapted, and their demands indicate their changing expectations. The language in which the petitions and their replies were framed also underlines this process. Of course demands for improvement or modifications were fulfilled only in varying degrees. For instance, while the demand for lighting in the carriages passing through NWP was readily fulfilled, toilets were provided only half a century after the commencement of the railway operations; and complaints against over-crowding were never redressed. This unevenness was perhaps a product of the interplay of two factors: *one*, the capital outlay involved in fulfilling specific demands; and *two*, the status of those who made the demand. The expenses involved in putting oil lamps in carriages were negligible, and the demand thus fulfilled. Introducing toilets in lower class carriages involved either acquiring a new or modifying existing rolling stock, and the companies were not willing to expend the amount involved. Similarly, profits were helped, rather than hit, by over-crowding and so it not surprising that it was one grievance which was never redressed. Moreover, people affected by over-crowding or the absence of toilets were neither respectable nor middle-class, and thus lacked sufficient clout to push for reforms. It was no coincidence that the EBRC had to rescind its decision to remove seats from the third class carriages, while the introduction of seat-less, fourth class carriages did not attract similar

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<sup>325</sup> Idem, reply to Mr. G.N. Kane from the Private Secretary to the Viceroy, Simla, dated 29<sup>th</sup> June 1893

<sup>326</sup> 'Dabdaba-i-Qaisari' 9<sup>th</sup> January 1894, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/71, OIOC.

<sup>327</sup> The GIPR introduced it in 1895 and the EIRC in 1902. Prayag Samachar' 9<sup>th</sup> April 1896, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', L/R/5/73, 1896; 'Bangabasi' 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1902, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/28, 1902, OIOC.

demands. The debates around the issue was never about the propriety of the measure. They revolved around whether or not it undermined the social rank of the persons travelling in these carriages. The process is also well illustrated in the lack of engagement with the issues of over-crowding or the absence of toilets in the lower class carriages in the travelogues. While the former managed to attract sporadic notice, the latter never received any attention. And this once again highlights the role of status in influencing railway policies in colonial India. For instance, toilets were demanded also by the intermediate class passengers as their absence was seen as an affront to their gentility. Interestingly, a lack of toilets was noted to be the only trouble which 'native gentlemen' faced while travelling by the intermediate class. They argued, that the facility should not be denied simply because of their inability to afford to travel in the second class carriages.<sup>328</sup> Therefore here, definitions of status came to be reassessed according to a new measure provided by railway travel.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which Indians adapted to the demands of railway-specific sites. It highlights their role in shaping these sites, which in turn questions hitherto held assumptions about railway policies being impervious to the requirements of Indian passengers. It brings out a process of interaction and negotiation between Indian passengers and the railway authorities. But this process was complex. Its operative logic was framed within a colonial context; and, therefore, though marked by commercial and equitable reasoning, it was also unequal. Further, it was shaped by ideas of status or rank which questions previously held ideas of railway relations being solely influenced by race. Perhaps a more useful way to understand this process would be to think in commercial terms. In the demands and pressures for improvements in the facilities at the stations, and in the carriages, two related arguments appear consistently: that service/facilities should be commensurate with the price of the tickets; and that lower class passengers could be given inferior facilities because they paid less. As noted earlier, Bharatendu's suggestion that the EIRC use its decrepit second class carriages for transporting third class passengers; or the demand for seats in carriages because of the higher cost of tickets - all point towards differential treatment based on economic ability. The demands for better facilities by upper class passengers were almost always made on the grounds that they paid higher fares than the lower class passengers. A newspaper report noted the intermediate class fare of the EIRC exceeded the third class by two pies per mile; but no additional comforts were provided in the former, the only difference being slightly wider seats and hanging berths. The report demanded the

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<sup>328</sup> Letter from Ratan Chand to the Secretary, Railway Conference, July 1890, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/3632, 1890, OIOC.

provision of cushions and privies.<sup>329</sup> Two other reports echoed similar sentiments. They underlined the difference in the fare of intermediate and third class tickets and claimed the former could not distinguished from the latter in any respect. This was argued to be a cause of ‘great annoyance’ and inconvenience to the intermediate class passengers.<sup>330</sup> Bharatendu argued that the inability of the EIRC to provide not so well-maintained carriages for its second class passengers was tantamount to duping its customers.<sup>331</sup> Evidently, Indian passengers thought of themselves as customers and perhaps deliberately to underline their significance in the railway economy. The railway authorities, too, did not miss the point. A substantial amount of official correspondence described Indian passengers as ‘customers’. Even if one is inclined to explain the usage as purely rhetorical, the choice of word brings out the dynamic interaction between Indian passengers and the railway managements. Further, ‘customer, and ‘money-value’, offered an additional, railway-specific index for identity formation based on status.

This interaction between Indian passengers and the railway authorities also had wider implications. But the scope of this chapter only allows drawing its lineaments. Introduction of measures to attract ‘native’ passengers, or accommodating their demands was based on stereotyping of Indians and Indian customs. The decision to employ high-caste Brahmins and Muslims as *bhistis*, to provide Brahmin cooks at the railway refreshment rooms, offering longer halts at stipulated hours for ‘natives’ to answer calls of nature, or seat-less carriages – all were based on a presumed knowledge of ‘native behaviour’. This was certainly a product of the wider process of colonial knowledge gathering, a characteristic of the nineteenth century Indian administration. And the railway companies’ decision to borrow from this pool of readymade information was not surprising, as it promised comprehensive understanding of the ‘native’ society. But the passenger response to these measures was not uniform. While measures like separate arrangements for refreshment facilities was approved and appreciated; substitution of toilets in the carriages by long halts or removal of seats was not. This not only questions the validity of these stereotypes; but, more importantly, it contests the claims of their impact on Indian society. Railway operations, it has been argued, created a homogenised category of Indian passengers based on racial ideas, and flattened the internal division within communities.<sup>332</sup> But, as is evident from the foregoing discussion, the impact of railway

<sup>329</sup> ‘Prayag Samachar’, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1888 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/65, OIOC

<sup>330</sup> ‘Sulabha Samachar’ and ‘Kushdaha’, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1887 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/13, OIOC.

<sup>331</sup> Bharatendu, ‘Baidyanath’; he used the word *grahak*, lit. customer.

<sup>332</sup> Goswami, ‘Producing’.

operations on issues of identity was quite opposite. The railway travel practices as mediated through the new sites shaped and modified existing structures of Indian society and added new dimensions. It sharpened the existing ideas of social rank and respectability. It would perhaps not be an exaggeration to claim that travelling in upper class railway carriages was as much a mark of social standing, as a more comfortable journey.<sup>333</sup> It cannot be denied that the policies chosen for arranging refreshments for passengers were based upon an understanding of Indian society which placed caste and religious identities at the centre; but it did not create these identities. On the other hand, if anything, these measures crystallised existing ideas of purity and pollution, first by providing facilities in keeping with the caste or religious rules; and secondly by pandering to demands based on such ideas with sustained regularity. Whether it was the decision to offer the contracts to Brahmins to manage the refreshment rooms, or to employ Brahmins as food inspectors, or suspending lower-caste *bhistis* followed by passenger complains – the impact was not a levelling of identities, but self-awareness. Not surprisingly therefore, Baboo Gopalram, author of a Hindi travelogue praised the drinking water arrangements of the Bengal Nagpur Railway's over the EIR's because the former employed *bhistis* as well as *paani-panrey* while the latter 'seemingly' employed only the former.<sup>334</sup> He questioned the logic of the arrangement by asking if the EIR thought 'Hindus do not feel thirsty?' Similarly, the *Oudh Akhbar* noted two instances of disregard shown by the railway companies to Hindu and Muslim sensibilities, and urged caution.<sup>335</sup>

The impact of this self-awareness is also evident in the ways in which railways provided a kind of microcosm to Indians of the things that were objectionable about British rule and attitudes. Over-crowding and lack of toilets in lower class carriages became symbolic of the deficiencies of a railway system operating in the colonial context. And failure to redress the issues was argued to be symptomatic of the colonial administration's steadfast refusal to treat Indians in humane manner. Newspaper reports routinely criticised the railway authorities' refusal to redress grievances despite repeated appeals. In a particularly striking criticism about the lack of toilets, a newspaper report argued: 'this refusal can only be explained by racial prejudice of the Government. In spite of professing equality of all subjects, it is regretful the administration remains indifferent to such a serious grievance of

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<sup>333</sup> It was a deliberate measure on part M.K. Gandhi to decide to travel third class, causing much vexation to his mentor Gokhale and subsequently his colleagues. See, M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: the story of my experiments with truth* (New Delhi, re-print, 1998).

<sup>334</sup> Gopalram 'Lanka'; the difference is religious. A Bhisti is Muslim, and paani-panrey, Hindu, usually Brahmin.

<sup>335</sup> See foot note 73.



‘native’ passengers.’<sup>336</sup> The timing of these trenchant criticisms was no coincidence. The reports begin to appear only from the late nineteenth-century and by the turn of twentieth century they had become more strident and radical. The clue to this lay in the rising anti-colonial movement and the passing of railway management to the Government of India. Thus the linking of railway issues with the wider politics was part of the *Zeitgeist* – nationalism representing an inclusive nation, not a ruling class. This also explains well a shift from earlier position. Once ‘respectable middle-class’ passengers approved the lack of facilities in the lower class carriages as good enough for those classes who travelled in them. Later equal facilities were claimed for all, regardless of race or class. As noted in the previous chapter, here again it can be argued that railway travel reinforced collective identities, though such sentiments were qualified by affiliation to specific class, race, and community. But railway encounters provided occasions to override older associations, while at the same time offering a new index to re-assess identities. It also encouraged, through railway policies, of securing specific interests based on identities. Such experiences therefore, had wider social implications.

This chapter has looked into the ways in which Indian passengers adapted to the new, railway-specific sites. It has argued for a greater role of Indians in shaping these sites by highlighting a complex interplay between the pecuniary needs of the railway companies, and the pressures exerted by ‘native’ passengers. In other words, it was an attempt to recover the agency of Indian railway passengers which had hitherto remained unexplored. The chapter also argued for a more differentiated profile of Indian passengers than the homogenous category of ‘native’ passengers, and for a critical role for ideas of status in shaping railway policies and experiences. Finally, it has hinted that these changes had wider implications for Indian society, consequences of which would be discussed in subsequent chapters. The next chapter will explore the links between railway travel practices and crime.

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<sup>336</sup> Dabdaba-i-Qaisari, 9<sup>th</sup> January 1894, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/71, OIOC.

## Chapter Four

### *Crime and Railway Travel Practices*

In a Bengali detective story written in the late nineteenth century the author chose to situate his narrative in a railway compartment and by so doing signalled (pun intended) the link between crime and railway journeys. In this story, two passengers travelling to Calcutta in a second class carriage were robbed off their cash and jewellery respectively while in transit. The theft occurred at night and the passengers did not have any inkling of the incident as they were drugged by the thief. When they regained consciousness the next morning the valuables were gone. Complaints were lodged with the railway police and an investigation followed, but the police could neither catch the criminal nor recover the stolen items.<sup>337</sup> The story brings out the ways in which criminal activities jeopardised passenger safety during railway travel. This chapter will focus on ‘railway crimes’ against passengers. By ‘railway crimes’ I mean those crimes which were specific to the railway including pre-existing forms of crime that were modified to suit the demands of a new form of transport. It will also explore the impact of crime on passengers’ perceptions of the railway system. As with the booking of tickets or consulting timetables, the risk of criminal assault forced railway travellers to adapt to the demands of the new system and these experiences played a crucial role in shaping their perceptions. Hitherto no attempt has been made to investigate the relation between ‘railway crimes’ and their foremost sufferers – the passengers. Though some attention has been paid by Leighton Appleby and David Campion, their focus was on institutional aspects.<sup>338</sup> For Appleby the establishment of the railway police as a special branch of the colonial police reflects the problems of the state in acquiring and maintaining exclusive authority and power to control law and order.<sup>339</sup> David Campion mainly highlights the official response to ‘railway crime’ and the development of modern, professional law enforcement in India.<sup>340</sup> This chapter instead aims underline the processes through which Indian passengers adapted and responded to ‘railway crime’. It will also assess the role of these experiences and responses (if any) on Indian perceptions of order and control in colonial India. The chapter is divided

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<sup>337</sup> N. Gupta: ‘Churi na bahaduri’ (1890) in R. Chattopadhyay and S. Ghosh [Eds] *Goenda aar Goenda* (Calcutta, 1994).

<sup>338</sup> As Ian Kerr and John Hurd rightly note, this aspect has received little detailed attention. J. Hurd and I. Kerr, *India’s Railway History: A Research Handbook* (Leiden, 2012).

<sup>339</sup> L. Appleby, ‘Social Change and Railways in North India, c.1845-1945’, (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 1990) Chapter 7.

<sup>340</sup> D. Campion, ‘Railway policing and security in colonial India, c. 1860-1930’, in R. Srinivasan, R. Tiwari and S. Silas [Eds] *Our Indian Railway: themes in India’s railway history* (New Delhi, 2006).

into two sections: the first section focuses on the ‘railway crimes’ and on the measures taken by the authorities to curb them. The second section looks into passenger responses to ‘railway crimes’ and appraises their impact.

## I

In the story alluded to in the opening paragraphs the crime committed was theft. It is no coincidence that the author decided on theft as an appropriate theme to frame his story because it was the most common form of crime inflicted on the railway passengers. According to the official reports, thefts at stations and from travellers in passenger trains were the most prevalent crime on the railways accounting for about one-third of the total amount of property stolen in transit. In this category were included thefts committed by pickpockets, and thefts of luggage and other things belonging to passengers whether on a train or at a station. It was also noted that all large stations were frequented by pickpockets, and thefts were usually committed those who made a livelihood by practicing their trade on the railway.<sup>341</sup> In the first Annual Report of the Government Railway Police (hereafter GRP) for NWP, 459 cases of thefts were registered.<sup>342</sup> The officials believed this number was much fewer than the actual cases. Theft and pickpocketing were described as the ‘most systematic’ kinds of crime committed on the railway. They were also the ones which were claimed to be committed with the greatest impunity.<sup>343</sup> The report also contained a comprehensive and lengthy note on the railway pickpockets by the Inspector General of the GRP which is worth quoting in full.

It [pickpocketing] is a regular trade and I [IG, GRP] may almost assert that the whole trade belongs to one gang, or at any rate known to each other. I cannot merely say what numbers of men ply this trade; but if I was asked what estimate I had formed of the number at a guess, I should say that there were no fewer than 500 pickpockets on the line between Delhi and Howrah. It must be borne in mind that the men who commit the thefts I am now writing about are quite a distinct class from those who steal from goods shed or rob trains in transit. The latter class belongs in a great measure to the villages and towns adjacent to the line, and for the most part is not entirely dependent on theft as a means of livelihood, but take to it more, as I may call it, an incidental speculation with the hope of making a large haul. The pickpockets however, come from all parts of the country, mostly from large towns, some of which are a great distance from the line. It is needless for me to enter into a description of the ways in which this class of thieves commits these thefts, as they are well known to all police

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<sup>341</sup> Administration report of Government of India for the year 1867-68, V/10/30, OIOC.

<sup>342</sup> Annual Report of the Assistant IG, Railway Police, NWP, for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1867 in P/433/44, 1868, OIOC; the report claimed many cases went unreported and the registers too were not kept up properly due to frequent re-organisation of the police force.

<sup>343</sup> Report of the working of the GRP in the NWP for 1868, in P/433/47, OIOC.

officers. At large stations such as Allahabad, Cawnpore, Agra, where native passengers often wait for hours for a train, and where there is always a crush at the ticket office, they thrive best, but they also drive a good trade by robbing a fellow passenger in the train when he is off his guard. Having fixed on a victim who he knows, or has good reason to think has valuable property about him, the thief will accompany him perhaps for hundreds of miles until he gets the required opportunity of plundering him.<sup>344</sup>

So pervasive was the incidence of thefts and pickpockets that a pamphlet published by a retired police officer claimed 'railway thieves' to be more dexterous and efficient than other classes of professional thieves.<sup>345</sup>

The police reports offer detailed information about the modus operandi of the thieves and the pickpockets. Judging from these reports it seems thefts were usually committed by well-organised gangs who fixed their 'headquarters' at a certain big towns. Some of their members would travel up and down the line, while others remained behind to watch the arrivals of trains and take measures for speedy disposal of any property which might be brought back. And if the police, having received notice of robbery committed, were alert in the stations where a train was due to arrive, then the gang members would also warn their colleagues travelling in those trains. In such cases, the thieves would leave empty handed, having passed on the stolen goods to their associates or would travel towards a smaller station where they could alight without fear of detection.<sup>346</sup> 'Railway thieves' were noted to travel often in the second or intermediate class carriages and to walk away with the boxes and bundles of fellow passengers at the stations when owners were asleep. Travellers were also routinely cheated and robbed by various other means. Of these, the most common was to drug passengers with food laden with sedatives. In these cases, the thieves usually posed as pilgrims and offered *prasad* to their fellow travellers. This induced sleep and when the passengers lost consciousness, their bodies and luggage would be thoroughly searched and valuable items stolen.<sup>347</sup> Apart from drugging, a newspaper article reported that on the Sindh Punjab and Delhi Railway, thieves frequently disguised themselves as ticket collectors and entered the carriages at night and decamped with whatever they could lay their hands on. If travellers were awake, they simply asked them to show tickets to remove any suspicion, and got off the trains.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Idem.

<sup>345</sup> P.M. Naidu, *The history of railway thieves with illustrations and hints on detection*, (Madras, 1915).

<sup>346</sup> Report of the police administration of the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, 1865, V/24/3192, OIOC

<sup>347</sup> H.D. Ross, 'A memorandum on wandering gangs of criminals' in 'The report on the inter-provincial crime', United Provinces, 1888, in V/27/120/6, OIOC.

<sup>348</sup> 'Koh-i-Nur' 14<sup>th</sup> March 1871, in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, North-Western Provinces, L/R/5/48, 1871, OIOC.

Apart from theft, passengers were swindled by groups of professional criminals who idled about the railway stations, entered into conversations with ignorant passengers and offered to purchase their tickets. After collecting the money, they either purchased tickets for short journey or ran away with the entire amount.<sup>349</sup> At Kanpur station, one investigation revealed a gang that made a livelihood by swindling passengers through these means.<sup>350</sup> The enquiry noted that, as there was always a large crowd of passengers, this gang operated undetected and chose their victims carefully. Most often they preyed on those who were unaccustomed to railway travelling and groups including several women and children. Usually such passengers rather felt glad of the offer to buy tickets. In return they got tickets for the first few stations on their way. When detected, the victims of such fraud were invariably thrown out of the trains by the ticket inspectors.

From the foregoing discussion it can be argued that the railway operations offered new opportunities for crime. The advantages of speedier transit, anonymity, and the reduced prospect of detection in a large assembly of people – all added to the attraction of railway as a new site of criminal depredations. The novelties of railway travel practices, especially the rules regulating ticketing or having people sleep in places accessible to any passer-by and the sharing of carriages or waiting rooms with strangers offered new opportunities to criminals. Whether they were swindling passengers of their money for fares or stealing valuables by posing as railway employees, the criminals utilised the rules and demands of the new transport technology to their advantage. In a not-so-rare instance of complimenting the ability of the criminals to familiarise themselves with the nuances of the railway system, a police officer noted that on questions of distances and fares, ‘railway thieves’ might be consulted as safely as a Bradshaw!<sup>351</sup> Railway operations also modified existing forms of crime. Being drugged and robbed in transit was certainly not new. For instance, writing at the turn of twentieth century, author of a Bengali travelogue reminisced how in pre-railway days pilgrims on their way to Puri often suffered at the hands of thieves who offered drug-laden *prasad* and decamped with their valuables.<sup>352</sup> However, the introduction of railways, the author noted, had not made much difference as the thieves had just expanded their area of operation. If anything, the speed and anonymity offered by the railway transformed the

<sup>349</sup> Report on the Police Administration in NWP, 1871 in V/24/3166, OIOC.

<sup>350</sup> Annual Report of the Assistant IG, GRP for the year 1871 in V/24/3167, OIOC.

<sup>351</sup> ‘Prevention of offence in the Native States by contractors’, 1872, A note by Colonel Harvey, Consulting Engineer to the Government of India for State Railways, in The Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/585, 1872, OIOC.

<sup>352</sup> D. Rakshit, *Bharat Pradakshin* (Calcutta, 1903).

mechanics of this kind of theft offering easier means of escape and fewer (often late) chances of detection. Police and Railway officials admitted the railway's role in engendering a distinct group of offenders - the 'railway criminals'.<sup>353</sup> But this claim contained a caveat: 'railway criminals' were identified as members of 'criminal castes and tribes'. In other words, while acknowledging the emergence of new forms of crime in response to the railway, officials argued that the assaults were committed by those who were criminals by nature or birth.

The obsession with caste affiliation is evident in the official records which in most cases referred only to the caste background of the railway criminals. Offenders were noted as Bhamtas, Mewatis, Ahirs or Gond-Barwars, and the link between their caste identity and chosen profession was underlined without any nuance. Being members of 'criminal castes' these individuals were argued to be 'exceptionally alert' to new opportunities of expanding their professional activities. For instance, the police officers of the NWP noted the extensive use of the Awadh and Rohilkhand railway network by Gond-Barwars, Mallahs and Passis to travel to destinations on the EIRC line in order to reach Bengal without any trouble.<sup>354</sup> The identification of 'railway criminals' as members of the 'criminal castes' seemingly offered two related advantages: *one*, since the offenders' inclination to commit criminal acts was pre-determined, their activities were beyond any attempts at either control or reform. And *two*, being members of specific caste groups they were expected to behave or function in ways peculiar to their calling and their modus operandi was claimed as distinct to their castes. The 'knowledge' of such distinctive behaviour was argued to make these criminals easy targets for arrest and conviction. For instance, the *Bhamtas* were noted to dress well to avoid suspicion and usually travelled in gangs with members scattered over in different carriages. Once their co-passengers were asleep, they stole whatever valuable were in the luggage and passed on the stolen goods to one of their gang members in an intervening station.<sup>355</sup> Or *Ahirs* were argued to be practising their trade by posing as pilgrims and offering drug-laden *prasad* to their fellow travellers.<sup>356</sup>

Such beliefs influenced methods of regulating railway crime. In most cases an argument for close surveillance on the movements of the members of these 'criminal castes' was made. In a police report noting the activities of the *Gond-Barwars*, the officials claimed that at

<sup>353</sup> Report of the Police Administration of Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, 1865, in V/24/3192, OIOC.

<sup>354</sup> Letter from IG police, Lower Provinces to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 1869, in The Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India, P/585, OIOC.

<sup>355</sup> Naidu, 'The history'.

<sup>356</sup> Report of the Police Administration of Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency, 1865, in V/24/3192, OIOC.

certain time of the year their members were known to make long journeys either by land or by water for the purposes of committing crime and thus urged the Awadh and Rohilkhand railway officials to give information to the GOB of the departure by rail of gangs of professional thieves.<sup>357</sup> Similarly, the movements of the *Bhamtas* were closely monitored, and on the suggestion of the Inspector General, GIPR, they were regularly mustered while at home and were ‘obliged’ to account for themselves when absent.<sup>358</sup> In the case of the *Mallahs* the solution was sought in a notice to be issued by the railway companies informing the district officials along the line about their probable movements towards Bengal or Bombay.<sup>359</sup>

Evidently, this identification of ‘railway criminals’ as members of ‘criminal castes and tribes’ was part of a wider administrative endeavour in colonial India which classified individuals as members of groups possessing specific characteristics. At the risk of simplifying a vast and theoretically critical literature around the subject, it can be noted that this official impulse created typologies of social groups based on a principle of guilt by virtue of blood, descent or association, rather than proven individual acts of criminality.<sup>360</sup> The ideologies propelling such efforts in colonial India were in turn drawn from ideas and beliefs popular in Britain where the notions of habitual offenders or a separate criminal class, whether due to social conditions or physical inheritance were very much part of the nineteenth century wisdom about criminal causation.<sup>361</sup> On the other hand, recent research questions the role of colonial state in ‘creating criminal castes and tribes’ and shows the idea was not wholly a British import: the stereotype drew substantially on indigenous sources.<sup>362</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to note that this easy identification was not very effective in controlling thefts and pickpocketing, as the official records admitted.<sup>363</sup>

At some levels it was argued that railways had created a distinct class of thieves which transcended easy classification. For instance, in a pamphlet written by the retired Superintendent of the Government Railway Police of Madras, the author claimed ‘railway

<sup>357</sup> Letter from IG Police, Lower Provinces to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 1869, in *The Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of India*, P/585, OIOC.

<sup>358</sup> Report of working of police of the GIPR, 1880 in V/27/160/6, OIOC.

<sup>359</sup> Ross, ‘Wandering’.

<sup>360</sup> For a useful overview on ‘criminal castes and tribes’ in colonial India see, A. Yang, [Ed] *Crime and criminality in British India*, (Arizona, 1985); also R. Singha, *A Despotism of Law: crime and justice in early colonial India*, (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>361</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, (London, 1991).

<sup>362</sup> A. Piliavsky, ‘The criminal tribe in India before the British’, paper presented at the Centre for Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

<sup>363</sup> ‘Police Regulations’, Bengal, Volume VI for the Criminal Investigation Department and the Railway Police Department, Calcutta, 1915, OIOC.

thieves' comprised people belonging to all castes and classes. To substantiate this claim he narrated in great detail the operations of a gang of 'railway thieves' from Tanjore whose members were Brahmins.<sup>364</sup> This discrepancy between stereotype and reality brings out well the contradictions of colonial administrative logic. This gap was acknowledged perhaps by devising other methods to control 'railway crimes' - by maintaining a register and descriptive roll of well-known or suspected thieves. Whenever an 'unmistakable' pickpocket was arrested his antecedents were verified from the police of his home district.<sup>365</sup> This information was subsequently recorded and printed in Hindi and Urdu, and placed with police officers to familiarise them with the descriptions of these offenders as well as to enable them to bring previous convictions to the notice of the court when such criminals were arrested.<sup>366</sup>

Despite these measures 'railway crimes', especially thefts, continued to plague railway passengers. These measures, it was argued, failed for a variety of reasons. Thefts were noted as difficult to detect as most often passengers were robbed when they were asleep and did not realise their loss until long after the crime had been committed. The time lapse between the theft and its detection usually offered the perpetrators enough time to escape. And being asleep, victims could not even provide any clue for the identification of the suspect. Passengers were also content to put up with their loss because they often did not discover that they had been robbed until they had left the station and then did not think it worth their while to return. In addition, they were said to be unwilling to report the crime because they knew the enquiry would be long and tedious and would impede their journey.<sup>367</sup> Light sentences passed by magistrates on the convicted thieves were also blamed for the level of crimes as they balanced out arrests and releases. Upon release, it was claimed, thieves returned to their old ways only changing the scene of their operations.<sup>368</sup> The district police was also blamed for being unaware of 'true calling' of the habitual railway thieves. It was argued, though well-known to the railway police, these thieves were not known in the districts where they resided and were passed off as well-to-do men of business, especially when they dressed well. Therefore, they came under suspicion if only they were travelling without tickets.<sup>369</sup> The railway authorities also blamed the 'peculiarities' of 'native' character as responsible for

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<sup>364</sup> Naidu, 'The History'.

<sup>365</sup> Report of the working of the GRP in NWP for 1868, P/433/47, OIOC.

<sup>366</sup> Annual Report of the IG, GRP, NWP for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1868, in V/24/3165 [1861-1868], OIOC.

<sup>367</sup> Report of the Police Administration in NWP in the year 1870 in V/24/3166 [1870-1872], OIOC.

<sup>368</sup> Report of the Police Administration in Bengal, 1889 in V/24/3198, OIOC.

<sup>369</sup> Report on the Police Administration in NWP for the year 1871 in V/24/3166, OIOC.



permitting criminal behaviour.<sup>370</sup> The apathy, indolence and indifference of the ‘natives’ was argued to afford plenty of opportunities for swindlers and robbers. Indian railway travellers were claimed to ignore constant warnings against listening to ‘friendly advice’ from thieves and charlatans; consequently they paid the penalty. Of all ‘native’ habits however, the proclivity to openly show wealth in the carriages was said to be the major cause of thefts. A report on the Police Administration of the NWP cited the following incident as an instance of this inclination: a 14 year old boy returning from the Sonepur fair showed his fellow passengers 1,100 rupees in cash, all in one bag, as a proof of his success in business. He eventually fell asleep and on arrival at MughalSarai station found his bag gone. This behaviour, according to the report, offered an ‘irresistible temptation to professional pickpockets.’<sup>371</sup> In a curious turn of logic, ‘natives’ were also blamed for being parsimonious, especially while travelling by train. Police officials unanimously agreed that ‘native’ passengers wished to save a trifle and insisted on travelling third class when they could well have travelled in second class if not higher. The Superintendent of Police of the GIPR expressed his disappointment at having repeatedly failed to convince the rich *sahukars* and other ‘respectable native passengers’ carrying money or ornaments to the value of some thousands, to travel second class where their property would be safe.<sup>372</sup> Such allegations exhibit racial stereotypes. It is possible that on occasion Indian passengers chose to travel in the lower class carriages to avoid travelling with Europeans. Moreover, the official claim that upper class carriages were immune from criminals is not borne out by evidence. Upper class passengers were susceptible to criminal assaults, and criminals routinely travelled in these carriages to avoid suspicion and detection. European passengers were also robbed. In one such instance the thief turned out to be one McDonald, who had escaped from a reformatory in England, travelled to India, and became a noted ‘railway thief’. His arrest was described as a great benefit to the travelling public.<sup>373</sup> In a second case, one Jung Bahadur, an English educated, well-dressed ‘railway thief’ targetted European passengers travelling first class. He did not raise any suspicion as he appeared to be a ‘native gentleman of affable manners’.<sup>374</sup>

These issues, though not insignificant, were not as responsible for the ineffectual control over crime, as were the inadequate policing arrangements for railways. It went through

<sup>370</sup> Report on the Police Administration in Bengal in the year 1889, in V/24/3198, OIOC.

<sup>371</sup> Report on the Police Administration in NWP, 1878, in V/24/3169 [1876-1880], OIOC; no one was arrested as the victim could not offer any clue to identify the perpetrator.

<sup>372</sup> Report on the working of police on the GIPR, 1880, in V/24/3151, OIOC.

<sup>373</sup> Report on the Police Administration in Bengal, 1872, in V/24/3198, OIOC.

<sup>374</sup> Report on the Police Administration in Bengal, 1885 in V/24/3198, OIOC; upon arrest Jung Bahadur was sentenced to six years’ rigorous imprisonment.

several phases. Initially the main concern was to safeguard railway property and freight; the safety of passengers was not even on the agenda of the railway companies. The 'railway police' consisted of watchmen or guards employed by the railway companies with limited powers and jurisdiction. They could only prosecute people who had contravened bye-laws of the railway companies and their territorial jurisdiction was limited to 'railway property'.<sup>375</sup> Further, the district or provincial police had limited or no access to the railway precincts because it was out of their jurisdiction, and if this rule were violated, it would complicate any legal procedures.<sup>376</sup> The provincial and central governments were aware of the limitations, which they thought created conditions conducive for assaults on passengers' property and persons. They also expressed their concern at the unsatisfactory condition of public safety in railway transit.<sup>377</sup> Despite rising pressure from government the railway companies were unwilling to change the system. For them the issue was financial. The Board of Directors of the EIRC claimed the limited policing was sufficient for their needs as the company required 'mere watchmen' and they were ready to accept the services of the state police for supervision. But the railway officials based in India were aware of the regular assaults on passengers. The agent of the EIRC at Calcutta underlined the need to ensure passenger safety and adequate policing as 'crucial', if they were to sustain the claim of offering safe transit. He claimed that if steps were not taken to control the frequency of assaults against passengers then they would seriously undermine the company's prospects of attracting 'native' passenger traffic.<sup>378</sup>

Towards the end of 1866 the Board of Directors of the EIRC agreed to meet the joint requirements of the government and the railway company, and to introduce a Government Railway Police.<sup>379</sup> This force was to be a part of the general district police and its duties were: to detect and prevent crime and fraud on the line; to enforce observance of the company's bye-laws; to maintain order and afford protection to the lives and property of the public on the railway; and to protect all railway property of every description, except private

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<sup>375</sup> 'Railway Property' refers to the railway stations, ticket-booking counters, platforms, yards, railway lines, trains and carriages and waiting rooms.

<sup>376</sup> Extract of a report by DIG Police, Meerut and Rohilkhand Division, 1864-65, in Police Report, North-Western Provinces, V/24/3165, OIOC.

<sup>377</sup> 'Railway Police Management', August 1864, extract of a report from Lt. Colonel H. Bruce, Inspector-General of Police in India to the Secretary to Government of Bengal, in P/163/33, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>378</sup> Extract of a report by DIG police, Meerut and Rohilkhand division, 1864-65, in Police Report, NWP, V/24/3165, OIOC.

<sup>379</sup> Report on the administration of police of the North-Western Provinces, 1866 in V/24/3165, OIOC.

dwelling houses and barracks.<sup>380</sup> In addition, it had ‘special duties’ which included: treating every passenger with the utmost civility, keeping the platforms clear and carrying out any orders they received for the comfort and convenience of the passengers, bringing to the notice of the station master if carriages were over-crowded, and carefully watching the movements of travellers and at once communicating any suspicious circumstance to their immediate supervisors and, if necessary, to the district police.<sup>381</sup> This force was jointly financed by the EIRC and government, the former paying one quarter of the expenses. This disproportionate expenditure was based on the EIRC’s refusal to increase its share in policing arrangements. The protection of the lives and properties of its subjects on the great thoroughfares of the country was argued to be the duty of the state; and maintenance of the Grand Trunk Road and the rivers without any additional taxes was cited as a precedent.<sup>382</sup> The efficient functioning of this modified policing arrangement hinged on coordination and the maintenance of a good understanding between the railway company’s agents and all railway authorities with whom the police force came in contact. But this was difficult to achieve and complaints were frequent when either the railway servants or members of police accused each other of hindering criminal investigations.<sup>383</sup> Further, the Government Railway Police were confined to the EIRC line, and the other railway companies only gradually accepted the services of the regular government police. The EBR Board decided to employ watchmen along their line and stations; and on the Oudh and Rohilkhand line the Government Railway Police were introduced as late as 1894.<sup>384</sup>

‘Railway crime’ was not restricted to criminal offences committed against passengers. Depending upon the circumstances both ordinary railway passengers and the railway employees could be defined as criminals. Passengers were defined as ‘criminals’ if they violated (with or without intent) the rules and bye-laws of the railway companies.<sup>385</sup> For railway employees, among other things, demanding bribes or showing incivility towards

<sup>380</sup> Rules for the guidance of Railway Police, ‘Circular’, from Lt. C.A. Dodd, Personal Assistant to IGP, NWP to all the district superintendents of police NWP, Allahabad, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1867 in P/433/42, 1867, OIOC.

<sup>381</sup> ‘Railway Police’ in Report of the Police of the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for the year 1865, by Lt. Colonel J.R. Pughe, IG, Lower Provinces, in Report on the Police Administration in Bengal, V/24/3192, OIOC.

<sup>382</sup> ‘Railway Police’, letter to the Agent EIRC, dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 1869 in Letters of the EIRC, L/PWD/2/85, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>383</sup> Annual report of the Assistant IG, Railway Police, NWP, for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1867 in the Proceedings of the Police Department, Government of NWP, P/433/44, OIOC.

<sup>384</sup> ‘Railway Police’, note by IGP, NWP, in P/433/42, 1867. In case of the Oudh and Rohilkhand Company, ever since it’s opening in 1871, the company refused to have Government police force on its lines. The GRP was introduced on company’s line in 1894. See, Report on the administration of NWP for the year 1873-74, V/10/137, OIOC.

<sup>385</sup> Railway Act, chapter two.

passengers constituted criminal offences.<sup>386</sup> For passengers, in most cases, the offence related to the violation of ticketing rules. The most common offence was travelling further than the destination to which a fare had been paid.<sup>387</sup> In Indian railway parlance, this was called ‘over-riding’. The number of passengers guilty of over-riding was substantial and the railway companies were keen to devise some means to recover the loss of revenue. Several measures were proposed which included sending up for trial persons accused of over-riding or charging excess fares from the offenders. Of these, the Government Railway Police favoured the latter as prosecution was seen to be a waste of time for the company's servants as well as the police. Further, for a case to be sent to a magistrate, a witness had to be provided as well the accused, and in most cases witnesses was difficult to procure.<sup>388</sup> In one such case of over-riding leading to prosecution, the accused Mahendranath Bandyopadhyay was sent to the magistrate without requisite evidence compelling the latter to observe: it is not convenient or proper that magistrate should be obliged to place defendants in *hajut* without any evidence against them’.<sup>389</sup> He added, that in cases of over-riding, the persons sent in were travellers, and almost invariably failed to find bail. As a consequence, very often penniless up-country men who had mistaken their station were put in jail for a few days quite unnecessarily.

In a report to the EIRC, the Assistant Inspector General of the Government Railway Police noted over-riding as ‘often inadvertent’. To substantiate the point he narrated an instance when he had taken a ticket from Srirampur to Hooghly, had fallen asleep, and gone on to Pundooah. It was provided that prosecution should occur only when the railway officer could bring forward sufficient proof to show over-riding was committed ‘*with a criminal intent to defraud the company*’.<sup>390</sup> The railway police also admitted that it was very difficult to know whether the ticket holder was a culprit or victim. Sometimes there was intent to defraud, but it often happened that the ticket holder was the victim. The ticket booking clerks were argued to frequently cheat the third class passengers, most of whom could not read; it was very simple for the ticket clerk when asked for, say a ticket from Cawnpore to Allahabad, to take the full fare for that distance and give a ticket only to Sirsoul, the first

<sup>386</sup> Idem; other offences included forcing passengers to travel in crowded carriages and use of physical force.

<sup>387</sup> Annual Report of the Assistant IG, GRP NWP for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1867 in Proceedings of the Police Department, Government of NWP, P/433/44, OIOC.

<sup>388</sup> ‘Railway travellers arrested for trifling offences’, letter from Colonel J.R. Pughe, IG, Lower Province, Bengal Presidency to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, March 1873, in Proceedings of Police Department, Government of Bengal, P/258, 1873, OIOC.

<sup>389</sup> Idem, letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> February 1873, from Officiating Magistrate, Hooghly to the Assistant IG, GRP, Lower Province., Hajut [Bengali/ Hindi]: Prison.

<sup>390</sup> Idem; emphasis original.

station out.<sup>391</sup> The existence of professional gangs of criminals offering to buy tickets and duping ignorant passengers also made it difficult to determine the intent of the ‘over-rider’. Interestingly, Indian passengers too acknowledged that cases of intentionally depriving the railway company of its revenue as rare. Most often, they said, passengers missed their stations because they either were asleep or did not have any means to understand (especially at night) which stations had passed by.<sup>392</sup> A newspaper article showed that only 104 out of 9,629 persons over-riding between 1 January and 15 September 1877 were handed over to the railway police.<sup>393</sup> This meant, the report argued, that only a fraction of those accused of over-riding were either unable or unwilling to pay the penalty, and that most passengers had no intention of cheating the company. The difficulties, passengers claimed, could be resolved if the names of the stations were announced aloud by the railway employees and a bell sounded to alert the passengers.<sup>394</sup> The suggestions were accepted by the EIRC and the station guards had to call out the name of each station as the trains entered the platform.

Cases of over-riding were followed up with some vigour because ‘railway thieves’ were noted to over-ride to avoid detection, content to pay the excess fare if caught. Being aware of this, the Inspector General of the Lower Provinces of Bengal proposed a measure in which all case of over-riding passengers were detained or watched or made subject to enquiries.<sup>395</sup> The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal turned down the proposal, noting that it would cause annoyance to honest travellers that would outweigh the gain to the police administration.<sup>396</sup> After much deliberation it was resolved that the station masters would have the discretion to decide whether to prosecute an offender for over-riding or to charge an excess fare.

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<sup>391</sup> Report of Police Administration, NWP, GRP, 1868, in V/24/3166, OIOC.

<sup>392</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, OIOC.

<sup>393</sup> ‘Som Prakash’, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1878 in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/4/5/3, OIOC.

<sup>394</sup> Letters of EIRC, L/PWD/2/84, OIOC.

<sup>395</sup> Letter from J. Monro, IG, Lower Province, Bengal to the Secretary to the GOB, Judicial Department dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1878, in the Proceedings of the Police Department, GOB, P/1325, OIOC.

<sup>396</sup> Letter from Major J. Hovendon, Officiating Joint Secretary to the Government of Bengal, PWD Branch, to the Chairman, Board of Agency, EIRC dated 19<sup>th</sup> October 1868 in the Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/44, OIOC.

## II

As noted already, another kind of railway crime was the abuses committed by the railway employees. Complaints against this form of crime appeared quite regularly in the newspapers of the period and offer a convenient entry point to discuss Indian responses to railway crime. By all accounts demanding bribes and ill-treatment of passengers were characteristic features of the railway operations. Ill-treatment covered two distinct issues: *one*, passengers being cheated by the railway employees; and *two*, passengers being subjected to physical or verbal assaults by the railway officials.<sup>397</sup> Asking for a bribe was arguably the more common of the two. The railway authorities acknowledged the prevalence of both cheating and assault by employees, whom they tried to suspend or fine if the allegations were found to be valid. But these efforts remained largely ineffectual because Allegations of demanding bribe were also hard to prove, and actions against railway employees could be initiated only when passengers registered a formal complaint and were willing to take up the issue with the railway authorities and eventually to the courts. In most cases passengers did not want to get into a legal wrangle which would have interfered with their travel plans. Many passengers did not pursue such cases also because they were too poor or illiterate or simply had no idea that such behaviour could be challenged. As official records agreed, many were thwarted by the complicated procedures involved in such cases. There *were* instances when railway employees were taken to court on charges of ill-treatment. In all these cases the victims were educated and affluent.<sup>398</sup>

The newspaper reports about railway crimes reveal an interesting pattern – until about the 1890s they focus primarily on crimes committed by the railway employees and on the workings of the railway police. Complaints about criminal assaults on passengers' persons and property begin to appear only in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. But before investigating this shift or its consequences, it will be useful to look into the issues which were raised as responses to railway crime. Till the last decade of the nineteenth century, newspaper reports mainly describe the railway police as inefficient, corrupt and prone to abuse passengers. Complaints began to appear in the newspapers almost immediately after the formation of GRP in 1867. As early as 1869 a newspaper article declared that 'the railway

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<sup>397</sup> Verbal assault was often accompanied by a physical one; and it was also not uncommon to be cheated as well as beaten and abused at the same time. For a literary take on this form of 'railway crime' see B. Harishchandra, 'Rel ka vikat khel, in *Harishchandra Magazine*, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1874, OIOC.

<sup>398</sup> See chapter 3.

police has not realised the object intended.<sup>399</sup> The failure to prevent offences such as theft or pickpocketing was not among the reasons for declaring the police force as ineffectual. Rather, the points raised were: the harsh behaviour of constables towards railway passengers; and that railway police personnel were practising all sorts of irregularities including demanding bribes. Such allegations were to remain the standard complaints against the railway police constables. A newspaper correspondent reported a ‘familiar sight’ when he saw a police constable taking passengers (who had paid bribes) to the ticket windows by the exit, while hundreds of passengers who had come by the proper door and were getting impatient at this ‘improper proceeding’ were shoved away by his colleagues.<sup>400</sup> A report in the *Oudh Akhbar* drew the attention of the railway authorities to the abuses practised by the railway police, again this included demands for bribes.<sup>401</sup> Similarly, another report complained about railway police constables misbehaving even with respectable persons with a view to extort money from them, though they were said to be especially prone to demand bribes from poor, ignorant villagers.<sup>402</sup>

A newspaper correspondent claimed to have witnessed railway policemen extracting bribes from passengers at the Sealdah station. The report noted that only those who had bribed the constables were allowed to proceed to the ticket rooms while the rest were grossly maltreated.<sup>403</sup> Another report at the turn of the century noted railway travelling as ‘very difficult’ for the poorer classes mainly due to incessant demands for bribes as well as other ill-treatment.<sup>404</sup> The railway police were also accused of colluding with thieves and pickpockets; or, worse, they were identified as thieves themselves. Both misdemeanours were associated especially with large stations where constables along with thieves and ticket booking clerks would relieve passengers of their money.<sup>405</sup> Official reports, too, admitted railway police constables’ alliance with thieves. Commenting on the continuous movement of professional gangs of poisoners and robbers along the EIRC, carrying large quantities of stolen goods, a report on the working of railway police in Bengal noted that the scale of these

<sup>399</sup> ‘The Indian Mirror’, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1869, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/46, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>400</sup> ‘Muraqqa-i-Tahzib’, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1881, Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/58, OIOC.

<sup>401</sup> ‘Oudh Akhbar’, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1872, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ NWP, L/R/5/49, OIOC.

<sup>402</sup> ‘Prayag Samachar’, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 1888 ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ NWP, L/R/5/65, OIOC; and Bharat Mihir, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1878, ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ Bengal, L/R/5/4, OIOC.

<sup>403</sup> Sanjivani, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1884, Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’ Bengal, L/R/5/10, OIOC; the newspapers were rife with similar news and suffice would be note that demanding bribe was perhaps a regular practice with the railway employees.

<sup>404</sup> ‘Nasrat-ul-Islam’, 6<sup>th</sup> April 1900, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/26, OIOC.

<sup>405</sup> Prayag Samachar, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1888, Selections from Native Newspaper Report, NWP, L/R/5/65, OIOC.

operations made evident the collusion of the railway police, who afforded aid and protection to the criminals for a share in the profits.<sup>406</sup>

The usual descriptions of Indian railway experience focus on ill-treatment related to racial prejudice. But the incivility of railway employees in general and of the railway police in particular was another constant source of grievance. The railway employees were known to rough-handle poor and ignorant people on the most trifling grounds. In a report in the *Oudh Akhbar*, railway employees, from the station masters or ticket sellers or peons, were noted to behave rudely to poor passengers and not to hesitate to assault them.<sup>407</sup> Another report in same paper argued that, the 'principal defect' in the railway system was the employment of impertinent persons at stations who freely abused one and all, especially ignorant villagers.<sup>408</sup> In a similar report the correspondent of *Bharat Mihir* noted how poor and ignorant people were often severely rough-handled by the police and that the ticket clerks were uncivil to them on trifling grounds.<sup>409</sup> A newspaper correspondent 'advised' railway police and clerks to be more mannerly and courteous, and once again that passengers of the 'lower-classes' were often ill-treated quite unnecessarily by all railway employees.<sup>410</sup> The correspondent of another newspaper, described an incident when crowds of pilgrims who had come to Calcutta for a religious festival were beaten by clubs by the Bengali station master.<sup>411</sup>

From the late nineteenth century however, the reports about 'railway crime' mainly focus on issues such as thefts, robbery and pickpocketing. Interestingly, the official records of the period (1890s onwards) also show an 'unprecedented' rise in railway thefts.<sup>412</sup> In 1891, the Annual Report of Government Railway Police for North-Western Provinces noted: 'the number of thefts committed on passengers by professional railway thieves is becoming very serious. These thefts are committed so cleverly that they are seldom discovered till the victims reach their destinations, or wake up in the morning.'<sup>413</sup> The successive police reports from the region continue to show an increase in reported thefts across the EIRC, the Indian

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<sup>406</sup> Note on the Railway Police dated 1<sup>st</sup> December 1865 from the officiating IG, Lower Province to the Consulting Engineer to the Government of Bengal, Railway Department, in the Proceedings of the Police Department, Government of Bengal, P/438/39, OIOC.

<sup>407</sup> *Oudh Akhbar*, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1870, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/47, OIOC.

<sup>408</sup> *Oudh Akhbar*, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1872, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' NWP, L/R/5/49, OIOC.

<sup>409</sup> *Bharat Mihir*, 9<sup>th</sup> November 1876, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' Bengal, L/R/5/2, OIOC.

<sup>410</sup> *Charu Varta*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1883, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports' Bengal, L/R/5/9, OIOC.

<sup>411</sup> *'Sanjivani'*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1891, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/17, OIOC; the correspondent was an eye-witness to the incident.

<sup>412</sup> Police Administration Report NWP, 1890, in V/24/3171 [1886-1890], OIOC. The report acknowledged the rise in thefts in all railways for the year 1890 and noted that property worth nearly 10,000 rupees was stolen in that year.

<sup>413</sup> Police Administration Report, NWP, 1891, in V/24/3172 [1891-1896], OIOC.



Midland Railway, and the Oudh and Rohilkhand lines.<sup>414</sup> A similar rise in crime can be noted in the police reports of the Bengal division of the early twentieth century.<sup>415</sup> The railway authorities blamed famine conditions and the paucity of the police force for this sharp rise in railway crime. How far the famine led to an actual growth of railway crime can be debated, especially when official records admitted that many cases of crime went unreported. Possibly, the distress caused by the famine led to more attention being given to cases of crime, so that more of it was reported and recorded.

In the newspaper reports the increase in crime on railway was argued to be symptomatic of a wider malaise - the government's loss of control over the reins of administration. The reports focus on two related issues: railway travel becoming increasingly unsafe; and the inability of the government to ensure passenger safety. A newspaper report of 1901 argued: 'the public had the same confidence in the railways as in the post-offices; but the frequent occurrence of thefts on the railways of late had begun to affect public confidence. If these thefts are not immediately put down, the loss of public confidence would be equally injurious to the railway companies as well as passengers.'<sup>416</sup> Another report noted that insecurity of life and property on the railways had reached 'scandalous' proportions and suggested a closure of the line (EIRC) if the situation could not be controlled.<sup>417</sup> A report in the *Daily Hitavadi* drew the government's attention to the frequent occurrence of dacoities and murders in trains and pointed out how these incidents had made it extremely unsafe for passengers to travel on railways, as opposed to earlier times when trains were regarded as extremely safe.<sup>418</sup> Few months later, another report in the same newspaper claimed the railway authorities were being outwitted by clever *budmashes* who had rendered the precautions taken for the safety of passengers utterly useless."<sup>419</sup> It also lamented the loss of the safety which intermediate and third class passengers had earlier enjoyed.

The government's inability to ensure safe passenger transit, the reports argued, undermined its claim to provide safety and order. A newspaper report described a 'sensational' train robbery as a 'calculated move to fix a very dark stain on the good

<sup>414</sup> Police Administration Report, NWP, 1901, in V/24/3174 [1901-1910], OIOC.

<sup>415</sup> Police Administration Report, Bengal, V/24/3203 [1901-1905] OIOC.

<sup>416</sup> 'Bharat Jiwan', 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1901, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/78, 1901, OIOC.

<sup>417</sup> 'Bangabasi', 13<sup>th</sup> April 1907, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/33, OIOC.

<sup>418</sup> 'Daily Hitavadi' 19<sup>th</sup> July 1910, in 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', Bengal, L/R/5/37, 1910, OIOC.

<sup>419</sup> Idem, 18<sup>th</sup> December 1910.

reputation of the railway administration and of the Government.<sup>420</sup> This report was about a robbery in which a group of dacoits entered the carriage in which the daughter of a pleader of Aligarh was travelling with her jewellery. The lady was robbed and the offenders bolted. The report noted how this ‘terrible incident’ had spread great consternation among Indian passengers, especially the females. Women had started to travel unattended, relying upon the arrangements for protection on the railway. The newspaper concluded that, if effective steps were not taken immediately to insure the lives and property of passengers, then travel by railway would be considered as unsafe as that by any other means. The government and the Inspector General of Police were requested to take some special and prompt action in the matter. Similarly, a report referred to a dacoity committed in a goods train at Buxar as a ‘disgrace to Government’ and wondered how a dacoity could be committed in broad daylight at a railway station like Buxar situated in British territory.<sup>421</sup> Another report drew attention of the government to the increasing number of railroad thefts on the EBSR. These thefts, the report argued, spoke of the total incapacity of the railway police. It questioned the inaction on these cases, while demanding serious consideration from the Railway Board or the Viceroy.<sup>422</sup>

Passenger responses to railway crimes add some crucial dimensions to our understanding of the relations between railways and Indian passengers. As argued in the previous chapters, these responses exhibit an element of interaction with the ‘railway system’. This relationship once again brings out the mutual dependence of the Indian railway passengers and the railway companies, of which both sides were aware. For instance, the agent of EIRC demanded more effective policing by arguing that its absence was a serious impediment to the growth of traffic. This mutuality is perhaps most evident in the issues surrounding crimes and abuses committed by the railway employees. Judging by the newspaper reports, such behaviour was argued to be detrimental to the growth of passenger traffic and the railway companies were urged to take actions against such occurrences. Not surprisingly, the railway companies also admitted the adverse effect of employee behaviour, on passenger traffic and tried to regulate employee behaviour though without much success. These responses also offer a corrective to our understanding of race relations in the colonial Indian railway. Indians were appointed as railway police constables, ticket and luggage booking clerks or even as station masters. The widespread prevalence of cheating and ill-

<sup>420</sup> ‘Zul Qarnain’ 7<sup>th</sup> June 1906, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, NWP, L/R/5/81, 1906, OIOC.

<sup>421</sup> ‘Bharat Bandhu’ 30<sup>th</sup> June 1909 in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/36, 1909, OIOC.

<sup>422</sup> ‘Bangabasi’, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1907 in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/33, 1907, OIOC.

treatment of poor, ignorant passengers at the hands of these railway employees question the easy correlation between race and oppression in everyday railway operations. While racial prejudices undeniably determined railway relations in colonial India, they do not offer a credible explanation for the widespread ill-treatment of Indian passengers by their compatriots. In such cases, class or social status may be a useful indicator for understanding the complex relation between Indian railway passengers and Indian railway employees. It was perhaps no coincidence that poor and often illiterate passengers were ill-treated more than their middle-class (educated) counterparts. This again highlights the role of social status in shaping railway conditions. But, at the same time, one has to be aware that the newspaper reports were written by middle-class, educated individuals and was consumed by a similar audience. Through these reports they were also making a claim to represent the cause of their poor and illiterate compatriots.

The responses to railway crime were not static either in terms of demands being made or the concerns which were raised. This flexibility is crucial to understand the ways in which issues around railway crime were deployed as an entry-point into wider discussions about the colonial rule. As noted already, by the early twentieth century there was a noticeable shift in the concern of the reports about 'railway crime'. Issues of criminal assaults on passengers' property and persons gained prominence over issues of bribery or even ill-treatment. This shift is puzzling because, judging by the official accounts, passengers had been subjected to criminal assaults ever since the railway operations began. This concern therefore came rather late and requires explanation. The changing political climate of India can perhaps offer a clue to understand this puzzle. The shift in concern about the nature of 'railway crime' inflicted on Indian railway passengers coincided with a rising anti-colonial movement. It may be related to a greater willingness to find fault with government and to hold it to account. Moreover, by the late nineteenth century, railway policing no longer remained a curious mix of private enterprise and government control. The GRP were employed along the entire railway network and the Government of India became responsible for ensuring the safety and security of railway passengers. This brought the government closer to complete control over the 'railway system'- arguably one of the most important instruments of the colonial administration. But it also made it susceptible to claims that it should ensure the safety of railway passengers. Given these changes, instances of criminal assaults on passengers offered an appropriate political point to challenge the authority and the claims of the government. Not surprisingly, the newspaper reports argued that the assaults on the railway passengers severely undermined the government's ability to ensure safe and orderly travel. This was a

classic technique to question the wider legitimacy of the colonial government to rule over India. If the colonial state failed to ensure the safety of people in general and railway passengers in particular, then its claims to rule were proportionately undermined. That the political climate added a crucial dimension to these responses is also evident from these reports. Their critical tone, though never forsaken, is usually tempered, and passenger safety is demanded as a responsibility as well as a paternal duty of the government. The use of this technique is well brought out in two newspaper reports. One ‘hoped’ that Sir Edward Baker (the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal) would protect and offer security to his ‘subjects’. While the other ‘requested’ the government to show at least one-fourth of the readiness to prevent frequent railway thefts as it did to stamp out sedition.<sup>423</sup>

This chapter has shown that railway passengers were subjected to various forms of crime while in transit. Railway operations created new forms of crime while modifying the existing ones. Drugging and robbing travellers or criminal gangs with headquarters in one place from which members travelled to commit crime was not unique to railway. But speed helped the thieves to move rapidly from place to place and, together with the crowds, provided anonymity as following a potential victim was easier and could be sustained longer on the railway. Railway travel also provided sequestration by cordoning off rich people in the upper class carriages; but, as noted already, thieves themselves often travelled in these carriages to avoid suspicion and to practise their trade. New travel practices and sites introduced by the railways offered new scope for crime. The tickets and the problems of buying and keeping them secure were particular to the railway. Similarly, a long wait at the platforms or in the waiting rooms provided a concentration of people in a confined area making the passengers easy targets of criminal assaults.

Railway operations also created a distinct class of criminals whose livelihood depended on them. This had an impact on the growth of police regulations which were thought to be specifically effective for ‘railway criminals’. We have seen that descriptive rolls, registers and eventually pictures of ‘habitual’ offenders were kept at the railway stations of the districts in which these individuals or gangs operated. In addition, their movements were closely noted, and district police were alerted if they passed through the stations. Such techniques, based on intelligence and information gathering, were innovative for the time and denote a shift from the practice of replicating official stereotypes without much thought. These regulations also had wider implications on definitions of crime and criminals, and on

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<sup>423</sup> ‘Daily Hitavadi’ 19<sup>th</sup> July 1910, and ‘Bangabasi’ [Hindi Edition] 27<sup>th</sup> January 1908, in ‘Selections from Native Newspaper Reports’, Bengal, L/R/5/35, and L/R/5/37, OIOC.

ideas of control, order and jurisdiction. More importantly, they demonstrate a process whereby crime was moving away from private to public responsibility. Nowhere is this clearer than in the government financing and raising a railway police force. The delayed response to this police force by some of the railway companies suggests a conflict between incompatible ideas of jurisdiction; the eventual acceptance underlines the completion of the process. The shift from private to public is also evident in the criminalising of violations of company rules and was accompanied by more exact definitions of what constituted an offence and who was a criminal. Defining the demands of bribes or the ill-treatment of passengers as crimes was a move to a more formal arrangement, away from what hitherto might have been regarded as opportunities provided by office-holding, especially for the low-paid. Similarly, describing railway employees as ‘servants’ of the company made them accountable (theoretically) for their behaviour and added an element of public responsibility. Not surprisingly, these changes also had bearing on the responses of Indian passengers to ‘railway crime’ and the newspaper reports illustrate this. By using railway crimes as problems of order and control to question the legitimacy of the government, these reports made an explicit connection with issues of jurisdiction. Interestingly, the government’s decision to take railway matters in its hands was perhaps a culmination of a long process of the transformation of railway jurisdictions from independent little enclaves into a singular entity.

The pervasiveness of railway crime also challenges the oft-repeated claims of the colonial state that railway transit was a safer mode of transport and, that by extension, it represented their ability to offer better governance than their pre-colonial predecessors. Ironically though not surprisingly, this note of confidence is totally absent from the official records pertaining to railway crime. If anything, these records are much closer to the public perception of railway travel as potentially risky; they admit with rare candidness the inadequacies of policing arrangements or even that their own personnel were corrupt and often unmanageable. The implications for passengers’ perceptions of railway transit were significant. It is no coincidence that the protagonist of the Bengali detective story, with which this chapter began, pretended to carry a revolver as a deterrent against potential criminal threats. The poor peasant in *Rel-ka-vikat-khel* declared aloud that railway employees were thieves. Both these responses, though fictional, bring out not only the range of crimes passengers were subjected to; but also their responses which varied from empty threats to exasperation. It is evident from the newspaper reports that the passengers did not perceive railway travel as either safe or orderly. On the contrary, they were aware of the ways in

which it could be unpleasant. Passengers had to be alert to the presence of swindlers, thieves, pickpockets and corrupt railway employees. Judging by the police records it can be argued that this process, in addition to the need to adapt to the travel practices introduced by railways was uneven and slow. If anything, crime undermined the attraction of railways as a convenient, safe innovation.

This, and the previous chapters bring out the ways in which the railways created new sites, and new categorisations, both made apparent in negotiations between Indian passengers, railways, and government. Evidently, railways had social impact. The collective experience of railway travel created conditions for re-assessment of identities, and social norms and attitudes. Though these sentiments were qualified by class, race, community and gender dimensions; yet, the subjective basis of railway experiences had wider social implications. While on hand, it promoted transformation, on the other, it reinforced 'tradition'. These opposing tendencies reflect a dialogue between railway travel as a working-out of social relations, and conflicting social interests and spatial practices. In other words, the objective, and mechanical aspects of railway travel have provide occasions to assess the social impact of the railways. This also illustrates Lefebvre's idea that infrastructures (here railways) are materialisation of social relations. Further, as noted earlier, the impact of the railways went beyond social. The collective nature of railway experiences created conditions for re-assessing, and expressing identities in political terms. As the discussion on food, drinking water, toilets in carriages, and railway crime illustrate, the railways offered a new arena to assert identities based on ideas of race and nation. Moreover, as the newspaper reports on railway crime demonstrates, the railways, by bringing together railway policies, the government agencies, and Indian passengers, opened possibilities of political dissent by linking responsibility (railway companies), with liability (colonial state). The following chapter will appraise the role of railway in transforming the purposes of travel.

## Chapter Five

### *Railway and the transformation of journeys*

The introduction of railways in India made travelling popular. Its impact on the practices of journeys has already been noted in the earlier chapters. This chapter will assess the impact of the railways on the nature of journeys in colonial India. By nature of journeys, I mean the subjective experience, the way journeys were felt or interpreted and also their purposes. There is a consensus about the railway's role in magnifying the number of travellers. But there have been hardly any attempts to analyse the subjective response of Indians.<sup>424</sup> This chapter aims to fill this gap by examining the character and influence of two distinct sources: the railway guidebooks and the travelogues. The choice is deliberate. They are of course different: the former were commercial and institutional responses to the railway; and the latter private reactions, though by no means intended for limited audience. But both texts can primarily be seen as responses to the encounter with the railways. The railway guidebooks examined here are those published between the 1860s and the early twentieth century and include travel guides and guidebooks to particular towns or cities. The travelogues were published roughly during the same time and are mainly in Bengali and Hindi.<sup>425</sup> The chapter is divided into three sections: the first two sections are about railway guidebooks and travelogues respectively. These sections examine the content, growth, and the use of these texts to assess their influence in shaping the nature of journeys. The final section underlines railway's role in shifting the experience and understanding of journeys, mainly by comparing pre-railway travel narratives with post-railway ones.

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<sup>424</sup> The only form of journeys on which railway's impact has been analysed is pilgrimage. See Ian Kerr, "Reworking a popular religious practice: the effects of railways on pilgrimage in nineteenth and twentieth century India", in I. Kerr [ed] *Railways in Modern India*, (New Delhi, 2001) and K. MacLean, *Pilgrimage and power: the Kumbh mela in Allahabad, 1765-1954*, (New Delhi, 2004).

<sup>425</sup> For a comprehensive list see, J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of Bengali printed books in the library of the British Museum* (London, 1886) OIOC and J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogues of the Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushtu printed books in the library of the British Museum* (London, 1893), OIOC, Volume 1 for Hindi texts.

## I

The role of railway guidebooks and travel guides in the ‘advent of tourists’ and in the creation of national identity in Europe has received scholarly attention.<sup>426</sup> Guidebooks have also been analysed as products of the most advanced stage of Orientalism which fulfilled an important ideological function for European colonialism.<sup>427</sup> Critical examination of guidebooks has highlighted their use to European travellers. In the case of India, guidebooks have received little attention and, with one exception, discussion of railway guidebooks is non-existent.<sup>428</sup> This solitary reference comes from Laura Bear’s work. She argues for a ‘scriptural economy’ provided by the travel literature and guidebooks to the European railway travellers which allowed them to gaze at picturesque India (from the railway carriage), ignoring the ‘despotic presence’ of the colonial state.<sup>429</sup> While this description brings out a crucial element, it misses a significant point: the presence of Indian railway travellers. But, before exploring this aspect, an overview of the growth and content of the railway guidebooks will be useful.

The railway guidebooks in India (as in Europe) were published as a portable source of ‘useful information’ to aid travellers in planning their journeys.<sup>430</sup> Indian railway guidebooks were first published by the firm of Bradshaw and Blacklock in 1860.<sup>431</sup> This firm was already well known for publishing ‘cheap yet decent’ railway guides across Britain and Europe and so complete was the identification of the railway guidebooks with the publisher’s name that by the 1840s the word ‘Bradshaw’ had become synonymous with railway guidebooks.<sup>432</sup> Bradshaw was not the only publisher to anticipate the commercial importance of the expanding Indian railway network. It was joined by other firms most notably W.

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<sup>426</sup> J. Borocz, ‘Travel Capitalism: the structure of Europe and the advent of tourist’, in *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 34, 4, 1992; also R. Kosher, ‘What ought to be seen: tourists’ guidebooks and national identity in modern Germany and Europe’, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 33, 3, 1998.

<sup>427</sup> Ali Behdad followed by Inderpal Grewal explored guidebooks’ role in representing and controlling Orient. See A. Behdad, *Belated travellers: Orientalism in the age of colonial dissolution* (Cork, 1994); also I. Grewal, *Home and Harem: national, gender, Empire and the cultures of travel* (London, 1996).

<sup>428</sup> Though India has received little attention it is generally accepted that guidebooks fulfilled similar ideological and political functions there as in other parts of the world.

<sup>429</sup> L. Bear, ‘Travelling modernity: capitalism, community and nation’, (Unpublished PhD dissertation) University of Michigan, 1998, p. 101.

<sup>430</sup> P. Fitzgerald, *The story of Bradshaw’s Guide* (London, 1890).

<sup>431</sup> The British Library has a collection of railway and travel guidebooks from India. The earliest one was published in 1860 and the preface of this volume notes there was no earlier publication. See, Bradshaw’s handbook to the Bengal Presidency and Western Provinces of India, Calcutta, 1860, OIOC.

<sup>432</sup> ‘Bradshaws’ owe much of their success to George Bradshaw, a cartographer, printer and publisher. He played a pioneering role in developing the most successful and longest published series of combined railway timetables. See, G.R. Smith, *The history of Bradshaw: a centenary review of the origin and growth of the most famous Guide in the world* (London, 1939).



Newman and J. Murray. Murray's too had a significant presence in the European railway guidebook market and had been publishing guidebooks since 1836.<sup>433</sup> As a result, the design, style and lay-out of Indian railway guidebooks were heavily influenced by their European counterparts. The railway guidebooks were available under various titles: 'The Bradshaw's Handbook', 'The Newman and Company's Railway Handbook and Guide to Principal Stations' and 'The Murray's Handbook'. These volumes dealt with each of the Presidencies of British India separately and the titles gave away their regional focus. Typical titles are: 'Bradshaw's Handbook to the Bengal Presidency and Western Provinces of India'; and 'The Newman's Tourist Guide to the principal stations between Calcutta and Mooltan and Allahabad and Bombay'. The contents were sub-divided by an arrangement which offered separate information about lines, timetables and the principal stations managed by the different railway companies. A good example of this is 'The Newman's Handbook' which has four sections. The first one deals with information about the EIRC network, the second section is on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company, the third is about the SPDR, while the final one deals with the GIPR.<sup>434</sup>

The railway guidebooks contained timetables, coaching and freight tariff charts, railway bye-laws, lists of accommodation and refreshment facilities available near the railway stations, a glossary of 'useful' terms in the main languages of the districts which the line traversed, and descriptive notes about the passing landscape. These notes contained information about the physical setting, historic associations and ethnographic details of the regions covered by the railway network. In addition, notes about principal stations contained a list of 'places of interest' in and around the area. Initially much of this information was taken from the military route books, and the early editions of 'Bradshaws' used excerpts from route books published by the Presidency administrations.<sup>435</sup> Though useful, these sources did not offer much information which could appeal to prospective travellers. Being military route books their main concern was the availability of provisions and accommodation at the different stages of a journey. They contained minimal descriptive details about places of interest along the routes. The publishers were aware of this drawback and looked for suitable sources to supplement the information. A solution was found in the district gazetteers,

<sup>433</sup> N. Parsons, *Worth the Detour: A History of the Guidebook* (UK, 2007).

<sup>434</sup> 'The Newman's Tourist Guide to the principal stations between Calcutta and Mooltan and Allahabad and Bombay', Calcutta, 1864, OIOC.

<sup>435</sup> Throughout the 1860s the Bradshaws of Bengal Presidency and Western Provinces borrowed from the following sources: F.S Roberts, *Routes in the Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta, re-print, 1865) and J. Clunes, *Itinerary and Directory for Western India, being a collection of routes through the provinces subject to the Presidency of Bombay and the principal roads in the neighbouring states*, (Calcutta, 1826).

monographs written by officials serving in particular areas, and pre-railway travel accounts written by Europeans. The practice of using these sources for railway guidebooks became commonplace. For instance, the following entries from the Newman's railway guidebook for Mirzapur and Allahabad were borrowed from the NWP gazetteers and Bishop Heber's travel journals respectively.

The next station is **Mirzapur**: a large town of 80,000 inhabitants, on the right bank of the Ganges, well worth a day's visit. Mirzapur is a great emporium of the commerce of central India and was a great cotton mart, but the rail from central India to Bombay is reducing its trade. The appearance of the town from the river is very imposing – the *chowk* and public gardens are well worth seeing and do credit to the public spirit of the natives. Mirzapur is famous for its manufacture of carpets, strong woollens, cottons and silks, but these are now said to be on the decline. The carpet manufactories deserve a visit. A drive of 5 miles close to the river leads to the temple of Vindyabasini, noted in former days for the number of thugs which frequented it. Six miles from Mirzapur there is a fine waterfall, about 60 feet in height. A day's journey from Mirzapur lays the valley of the Son, affording some of the most enchanting prospects to be met with in any part of India, rivalling in beauty the scenery of the Swiss valleys.

**Allahabad**: The ancient Prayag is situated on the tongue of land formed by the confluence of the Yamuna and the Ganges, and is considered by the Hindus as one of the most sacred localities, being a place where three rivers join. January and February are the great months of pilgrimages. The fort, built by Akbar, rises directly from the banks of the confluent rivers, which rendered it in former days nearly impregnable in that direction. It is still however a striking place and its principal gate as Bishop Heber observed “is the noblest entrance I ever saw to a place of arms.” The principal sight after the fort is the Serai and Gardens of Sultan Khusrū – the ill-fated son of Jehangir. The city of Allahabad is of considerable extent, but poor and ill-built. There is also a fine range of barracks and courts of law. Allahabad is the seat of the Government of the North Western Province and the high court has recently been transferred here from Agra.<sup>436</sup>

Similarly, Bradshaw's 'Handbook for the Bengal Presidency' used the Imperial Gazetteers and Francis Buchanan's account for describing parts of Bihar, especially the city of Patna and its commercial activities, its history as an important opium factory and the state of its roads and alleys.<sup>437</sup>

Borrowing from common sources made these railway guidebooks appear formulaic and repetitive. Nevertheless the guidebooks were quite popular and went through repeated editions right up to the mid twentieth century. This was mainly due to two reasons: the low price and easy availability of these volumes; and the nature of the information supplied. As for the first reason, railway guidebooks were readily available in the book-stalls on the platforms of important railway stations and were also sold through book-sellers in big towns

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<sup>436</sup> The Tourist's Guide: W. Newman and Company's East Indian Railway Handbook, a guide historical, descriptive and suggestive', Calcutta, 1870, OIOC.

<sup>437</sup> The description remained more or less unchanged in all volumes but the one used here is the 1868 edition. Bradshaw's Handbook for Bengal Presidency and Western Provinces, Calcutta, 1868, OIOC.

and cities. In addition, they were priced to 'suit every budget'. The second reason played an equal if not a more important role in popularising the railway guidebooks. The information was concise and it combined features of practical utility (the timetables, tariff charts) with ready-to-use 'knowledge' about the places travellers were moving through or were about to visit. Information about new railway lines branching out from specific junctions or alternations in timetables or tariff rates was routinely updated along with other facts such as opening of new hotels or railway refreshment rooms. The following excerpt from the Newman's guidebook illustrates the point well: 'from Cawnpore the traveller can now proceed to Lucknow by the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway. The distance is 42 miles and is performed in 2 ½ hours. The line passes through a perfectly flat and uninteresting though fertile country. The line is now opened to Faizabad.'<sup>438</sup>

The arrangement of information added to its utility. Characteristic features of places like religious sanctity, scenic beauty, historical association or commercial importance were highlighted, and attributes were used for classifying places. Thus the ruins of Gaur had antiquarian value, the marble rock of Jabalpur was noted for its natural beauty, and the Hindu temples and bathing ghats of Benaras was remarked on for picturesque scenery. This classification was also graded and a comprehensive list was made of places 'worth visiting'. Though the criterion for grading was never made apparent, a hierarchy certainly existed. Places like Benaras, Allahabad, Kanpur, Agra, Delhi, Mathura, Brindaban and parts of Rajasthan were listed as 'must see'. There was then a 'could be seen' list which included places to be visited if travellers had time and money to spare. For instance, travellers were advised to make a detour from Mathura/Brindaban to visit the palaces at Dig and Bharatpur as they were worth the time and money expended.<sup>439</sup> This hierarchy of places, based on a characterisation of interests, was one of the most significant contributions of the railway guidebooks. This touristic valuation did not replace the old sacred geography. Rather, places like Benaras, Allahabad or Puri gained from this classification. It was also not an exact match with the economic, political or social differentiation of places. For instance, the presence of a city like Patna was a mere coincidence, because as a political and commercial centre it would be on the railway network, but not really important because of it. While other hierarchies persisted, the railways and leisure travel certainly provided another register of relative importance: 'the sights'. The overlapping also explains why the hierarchy induced by the

<sup>438</sup> Newman's East Indian Railway Handbook: a guide historical, descriptive and suggestive, Calcutta, 1870, OIOC.

<sup>439</sup> Other places on the 'could be seen' list included the Chunar fort, Ayodhya, Motijhara falls, the Buddhist sites near Bhagalpur and Gaya.

guidebooks was successful in becoming popular within a short span of time. Related to the hierarchy were suggestions as to the number of days one could spend in exploring specific places. Murray's Handbook for Bengal 'suggested' five days for exploring Calcutta and its surroundings while a single day was thought to be enough to see around Mirzapur.<sup>440</sup> These volumes also had separate sections containing 'useful' information for arranging quick trips to places in the vicinity of the Presidency towns and the big cities. These places were chosen on the basis of easy accessibility as well as having a 'fair climate' for most part of the year. Each Presidency town had their favourites: for Calcutta it was Raniganj, Munger and Darjeeling; for Bombay it was Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani, and Matheran. Nainital, Dalhousie, Mussoorie and Simla served Delhi, and Ooty and Conoor catered to Madras.

Apart from the railway guidebooks, travellers also had access to a range of travel guides including volumes meant for specific cities or places. These usually contained the same information as the guidebooks though in greater detail. Place guides would add a fairly long description of the region's history, statistical details about the place and its inhabitants, and information about the administrative, educational or commercial prospects of the city. These guides were quite popular and went through several editions. The ones which appeared to be most in demand were about Kanpur, Lucknow, Benaras, Kashmir, and Darjeeling.<sup>441</sup> As the foregoing discussion suggests, guidebooks were an accessible and portable source of information for railway travellers. Not surprisingly, among Indian passengers possessing knowledge of English, consulting railway guidebooks became an established travel practice. Shayamakanta Ganguly, author of a Bengali travelogue, admitted that perusal of railway guidebooks was an integral part of planning railway journeys.<sup>442</sup> This acknowledgment was prompted by his need for reliable information while travelling on the newly opened Bengal and North-Western line. He finally bought the company's guidebook at Lucknow junction. The author was a representative sample of the section of Indian railway passengers who routinely used railway guidebooks to organise their journeys. Fakir Chandra Chatterji narrated a situation where he and his family wanted to spend the Durga Puja vacation outside Calcutta, and, being unable to decide where, went to Howrah station with two railway guidebooks (EIR

<sup>440</sup> The number of days suggested remained more or less same in all guidebooks. See Murray's Handbook for Bengal Presidency and city of Calcutta', Calcutta, 1882, OIOC.

<sup>441</sup> One of the most widely used varieties was Keene's Handbooks. Authored by H.G. Keene, an official of the Raj, the volumes were known for useful and 'reliable' information and went through several editions including one in 2000. See, *Keene's handbook for visitors: Allahabad, Cawnpore and Lucknow*, (Calcutta, 1896, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition) OIOC.

<sup>442</sup> S. Gangopadhyay, *Uttar Bharat Bhraman O Samudra Darshan* (Calcutta 1913).

and BNR) planning to board any train which was ready to pull out of the station.<sup>443</sup> Similarly, Jaladhar Sen, author of several Bengali travelogues, recounted his three-decade-old habit of consulting railway travel guides to plan his travel.<sup>444</sup>

This evidence of Indians consulting the railway guidebooks appears paradoxical as they were not the intended audience of these volumes. The Bradshaws were unequivocal about their prospective buyers. The 'preface' to the first edition noted the need for a through-route guide for those who came to India to serve in the various departments of Her Majesty's India service, and claimed such a guide would be indispensable for this group as well as non-official travellers.<sup>445</sup> Murray's volumes, too, offered 'hints to travellers', discussing the best seasons to visit Bengal (and India) and containing information on clothes to wear and health precautions to be taken.<sup>446</sup> Moreover, descriptive notes about places such as Kanpur reminded prospective visitors of the 'atrocious barbarity inflicted by the native sepoys on the British soldiers and civilians'. Similarly, hill-stations and sanatoriums were described in way to appeal specifically to Europeans. These places were recommended for their 'bracing climate' and its 'uplifting' impact on mind and body, and were advertised as substitutes for 'home'. This claim to an exclusive audience was not universal as in Newman's volumes, sections on 'hints to travellers' were conspicuous by their absence.

Indians using English guidebooks made no comments about their content. Possibly their preference were more subtly expressed as Newman's volumes were more popular than other publications.<sup>447</sup> And though at the turn of the century vernacular guides were demanded, it was primarily to cater to a wider audience. For instance, the editor of a newspaper complained against the practice of publishing railway guidebooks exclusively in English and demanded their publication in the vernaculars to enable 'persons of every class' to take advantage.<sup>448</sup> The report claimed the vernacular versions will be instantaneously popular. A lack of resentment against the content of the English guidebooks is also suggested by their near imitation when published in Indian languages, though some differences can be identified. In the vernacular versions, the sections on 'what to wear' or 'when to visit' are missing and the list of accommodation included 'Hindu hotels' and refreshment rooms in

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<sup>443</sup> Chatterji, 'Pather'.

<sup>444</sup> Published in 1903, one can safely assume that the author has been consulting railway guides since c.1870s. J. Sen, *Prabas Chitra* (Calcutta, 1905).

<sup>445</sup> This 'preface' remained unchanged in the subsequent volumes. See Bradshaw's Handbook for Bengal Presidency and Western Provinces, 1860, Calcutta, OIOC.

<sup>446</sup> Murray's Handbook of the Bengal Presidency with an account of the Calcutta city', Calcutta, 1882, OIOC.

<sup>447</sup> For a note confirming Newman's popularity see G.R. Aberigh-Mackay, *The Prince's Guidebook: the Times of India Handbook of Hindustan* (London, 1875).

<sup>448</sup> 'Hindustani' 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1907, 'Selections from Native Newspaper Reports', NWP, L/R/5/82, OIOC.

addition to European hotels. But the descriptive notes were not altered, hinting at an absence of any intention either to contest or provide to an alternate to the narrative presented in the English versions. The ‘preface’ of the first Bengali railway travel guide published in 1892 made it plain by noting that volume was a response to the absence of railway guides in the Bengali language especially at a time when more and more Bengalis were travelling across India. It was specifically aimed at first time travellers.<sup>449</sup> Similarly, the content of the first Hindi railway guidebook published in 1894 did not vary much from the English counterparts.<sup>450</sup> The contents of the English railway guidebooks were also adopted without many alterations by the Railway Board when in 1910 the first official Hindi and Urdu railway guide was published.<sup>451</sup> Translated from the English version and authored by an Indian, this volume differed little from the standard variety except that the list of boarding facilities was widened to include hotels or rest-rooms owned by Hindus or Muslims for the advantage of passengers belonging to the respective communities.

This effort at publishing guidebooks in Indian languages was perhaps part of a wider shift suggestive of a need to cater to an expanding and lucrative customer base. This is evident as the English guidebooks also began to offer additional information presumably to suit ‘native’ travellers. For instance, a guidebook published by the BNR included a chapter on pilgrimage in addition to a list of pilgrim centres covered by the network.<sup>452</sup> The timing of these changes is instructive. They began around 1913 and continued thereafter. Probably it was a product of the realization that Indians travelled as much as Europeans, and even if they did not, the sheer number of them travelling meant more profit. Moreover, from this time on, mainly due to wars and political changes, India did not remain as popular as a travel destination as it had been during the late nineteenth century. This is also illustrated by the reference to first time travellers in the Bengali guidebook. It is significant because those who by 1892 were seasoned travellers must have had used the English versions and probably did not need a Bengali guidebook. The new target audience possibly provided the motive for limited change, showing content was not the issue.

<sup>449</sup> Ochterlony hoite Qutub parjanto: orthat purvabharat rail path sanlagna katipay pradhanato sthaner drashtabya padartha shokoler patha pradarshika (Calcutta, 1892) OIOC.

<sup>450</sup> A. Ahmad, *Badri Yatra* (Lucknow, 1894) OIOC.

<sup>451</sup> A. Rasheed, *The Travellers’ Companion: containing a brief description of places of pilgrimages and important towns in India*, (Calcutta, 1910) OIOC. The volume was originally published in English but translated in Hindi and Urdu for Hindus and Muslims.

<sup>452</sup> *Travel in India or city, shrine or sea-beach: antiquities, health-resorts and places of interest on the Bengal Nagpur Railway, Bombay, 1916*, OIOC.

This apparent incongruity between the content of the guidebooks and their use by Indians can perhaps be explained by the nature of the information, which could be useful for anyone travelling to new places. Moreover, references meant exclusively for Europeans were not numerous. The guidebooks were practical travel aids. The availability of useful information in an accessible format added significantly to the mechanics of travel. The hierarchy of places, the descriptive notes and characterisation of interests, helped travellers to take decisions and organise their itineraries. This was crucial in the advent of ‘travel for leisure’ as a distinct purpose of journeys, and will be discussed in the following sections of the chapter. The acceptance and reproduction of the content of the English railway guidebooks by Indians also show that any influence of these texts was not limited to Europeans. They also question the binary division of coloniser versus colonised. This however is not to deny what has been said of the unequal relations between European and Indian railway passengers, or about the views Europeans had of India and Indians from railway carriage.<sup>453</sup> But if these texts allowed European passengers to ‘pass intact through the landscape collecting the picturesque’, then we have to consider their influence on the Indian readers who used them. We find that Indian readers of railway guidebooks not only consumed the same narratives, but also perceived and articulated their relationship to the passing landscape and its inhabitants in terms that were often very similar to those appearing in these volumes. This influence is most clearly visible in the travelogues written by the Indians, to which we now turn.

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<sup>453</sup> Bear ‘Travelling’.

## II

The travelogues analysed here were mostly published in Bengali and Hindi between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth century.<sup>454</sup> Analysis of travel writing has a fairly long history and travelogues have been identified not only as descriptive accounts of travel but as an ideological apparatus of imperialism.<sup>455</sup> Theoretical assumptions spawned by such researches have been applied to the travelogues written in Indian languages during the colonial period, mainly to explore the link between travel writing, the colonial state and the nation. Vasudha Dalmia, Kumkum Chatterjee and Harriet Bury have shown how, through these travelogues, the 'nationalist bourgeoisie' were contesting and creating ideas of nation, history, cultural identity and territory.<sup>456</sup> Useful as these studies are, they overlook the narrative style and descriptive notes about various places in these travelogues which reveal the influence of the railway guidebooks. This influence is clear, especially in the literary style, descriptions of landscape, the gradation of places, and the ideas of 'distance' and 'difference'.<sup>457</sup> This section will examine these influences to assess whether the 'scriptural economy' of the guidebooks had any impact on the ways in which the authors of the travelogues related to their surroundings.

As noted already, the railway guidebooks in India were patterned on the European and the British models, the sensibilities of which were exported to India. The European guidebooks around this time were influenced by the aesthetic ideal of the 'picturesque' which had its origin in late eighteenth century Europe. It was a part of emerging Romantic sensibilities and posed a challenge to the Enlightenment rationalist ideas about aestheticism. One of the main features of this ideal was to look at and express experiences of beauty and sublimity as being non-rational or instinctual.<sup>458</sup> In other words, aesthetic experience was not just a rational decision – rather it was a matter of basic human instinct and came naturally. In Britain during the mid-eighteenth century this ideal propelled an interest in the exploration of

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<sup>454</sup> Few travelogues were also written in English.

<sup>455</sup> M. Louise-Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation* (New York, 1992).

<sup>456</sup> V. Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu tradition: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth century Benaras* (Delhi, 1997); K. Chatterjee, 'Discovering India: travel, history and identity in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century India', in D. Ali [ed] *Invoking the past: the uses of history in South Asia* (Delhi, 1999); and H. Bury, 'Novel spaces, transitional moments: negotiating texts and territory in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindi travel accounts', in I. Kerr [ed] *27 Down: new departures in Indian railway studies*, (Hyderabad, 2007).

<sup>457</sup> Here the discussion will mainly be about Bengali travelogues because as Vasudha Dalmia notes, after Bharatendu Harishchandra, travel writing in Hindi slumbered for several decades till about 1940s. Dalmia, 'Nationalization'.

<sup>458</sup> M. Batey, 'The Picturesque: an overview', *Garden History*, Volume 22, Number 2, 9 (Winter 1994), pp- 121-132.



rural Britain. The practice of purely scenic touring began to take hold among the English leisured class. Inspired by the ‘picturesque’, travellers therefore sought beauty not in ordered regularity but in the wild, romantic and the quaint.<sup>459</sup> The irregular, the anti-classical, ruins and even ruined people – the ragged poor (viewed from a safe distance) became sought after themes. In Europe this trend of following an aesthetic ideal as part of travel for leisure became more widespread with the coming of the railways. But the idea of travel as leisure also came to be rationalised by underlining it as beneficial – a moral or educational activity; and the guidebooks imported these sensibilities to India.<sup>460</sup>

The ‘picturesque’ aesthetic was brought to India by the European travellers, years before the arrival of guidebooks. The work of Thomas and William Daniells gave a new dimension to ‘picturesque’ in their depiction of Indian buildings and scenery. They showed the rich possibilities which India had to offer.<sup>461</sup> This vision found most dedicated practitioners among European travellers, painters and scholar-administrators who roamed India ‘in search of picturesque’. As Thomas Metcalf has noted, India with its great rivers and mountain ranges, its ancient ruins and colourful peasantry, appealed powerfully to those who were inspired by the picturesque.<sup>462</sup> The railway guidebooks in India therefore merely chose to follow an already popular artistic convention. The Indian authors writing about their experiences of railway journeys also drew upon this aesthetic ideal. Most striking resemblances can be observed in the description of Bengal’s scenery, the hills of Teenpahar, the ruins of Rajmahal, the entry into Bihar, the comparisons between physical features of Bengal and NWP, and the descriptions of Delhi or Rajasthan. For instance, Baradakanta Sengupta’s travelogue opened with a quote from Byron which referred to the soul’s desire to meditate amongst decay and stand amidst ruins.<sup>463</sup> The influence of picturesque on this narrative is evident. The author also admitted using travel accounts written by foreigners but did not provide details. Sengupta’s account of Teenpahar and the ruins of Rajmahal is instructive because these rugged features, he suggested, broke the monotony of Bengal’s verdant but plain landscape. As ruggedness and non-uniformity of physical setting were among the main features of a picturesque vision, mountains, ruins of forts, temples, abandoned cities and even railway tunnels were seen as providing a suitable backdrop to

<sup>459</sup> T. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian architecture and Britain’s Raj*, (New Delhi, 2002).

<sup>460</sup> L. Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook’s Tours: a history of leisure travel, 1750 to 1915* (New York, 1997).

<sup>461</sup> First published in 1788 ‘Select views of India’ by Thomas and William Daniell fired the romantic imaginations by presenting a vast stock of scenery, temples, mosques, palaces and tombs. Thomas and William Daniell, ‘Select Views of India’, London, 1788, OIOC.

<sup>462</sup> Metcalf, ‘Imperial’

<sup>463</sup> B. Sengupta, *Bharat Bhraman* (Calcutta, undated).

describe the picturesque. For Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, the hills of Jamalpur and the Munger tunnel offered such visions.<sup>464</sup>

The influence of the guidebooks was not restricted to aesthetic appreciation, and has two aspects: the impact on the content of the travelogues, and on the underlying philosophy shaping their narrative. The first mainly consisted in borrowing excerpts from guidebooks to supplement the narrative. For instance, Kashinath Mukhopadhyay used Bradshaw to describe the 'country between Howrah and Burdwan stations'.<sup>465</sup> And few years later, Baradakanta Sengupta used Newman's volume to inform his readers about the same destinations. These authors were not exceptions. Baradaprasad Basu, Sadhucharan Prasad, Gostha Bihari Dhar, Kedar Nath Das, Durgacharan Rakshit, Prabhat Chandra Dube, Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri and Surendranath Ray, all acknowledged that their accounts were written with help from the railway guidebooks. Their use was acknowledged and even justified by claiming that these volumes were repositories of reliable information and that their content therefore could be used without hesitation. Some authors also appended a separate list of sources which they had used to supplement their information; this list included gazetteers, government publications and census reports.<sup>466</sup> The practice of using the gazetteers was commonplace and on some occasions the authors used them even without acknowledgement. For instance, Bholanath Chandra's description of Kanpur tallied with Thornton's as he described the city as a place of 'recent origin not mentioned by Babar in his narrative of military operations in the doab, and it is passed over in the Ain-i-Akbari'.<sup>467</sup>

There were two disadvantages from copying the content of the guidebooks. *One*, the borrowed portions lacked individual insight. And *two*, more importantly, they reproduced the same relation between the travellers and their objects of observation as shaped the railway guidebooks and informed the compilation of the government publications.<sup>468</sup> This usage offers us an entry-point to discuss and assess the second aspect of the influence of guidebooks - the underlying philosophy of the travelogues. One of the most noticeable

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<sup>464</sup> H. Bandyopadhyay, *Bhraman Vrittanta* (Calcutta, 1877).

<sup>465</sup> K. Mukhopadhyay, *Railway Companion* (Calcutta, 1863).

<sup>466</sup> Kalidas Moitra, Baradaprasad Basu and Prabhatchandra Dube listed gazetteers among their source while Sadhucharan Prasad used the census reports.

<sup>467</sup> B. Chunder, *Travels of a Hindoo to various parts of Bengal and Upper India* (London, 1869); also E. Thornton, *A gazetteer of the territories under the Government of the East India Company, and the native states on the continent of India* (London, 1858).

<sup>468</sup> The gazetteers were product of a long process of information gathering by the colonial state to fulfill administrative needs. Their content though factually rich, has been criticised for reflecting prejudices of the colonial state. See B. Cohn, 'Census, social structure and objectification in South Asia', in B. Cohn, *An anthropologist among the historians and other essays* (New Delhi, 1990).

impacts of the guidebooks was their acceptance and reproduction of a hierarchy of places. Baradakanta Sengupta not only borrowed the content of Newman's volume to describe the stations between Howrah and Burdwan, but also applied the same parameter to define the relative importance of places. For instance, Srirampur is described mainly as the place where the foundation of Bengal's eventual prosperity was laid, and Marshman and Carey's contribution is noted in detail. In contrast only a line is devoted to Mahesh. It is simply described as a prominent pilgrimage for Vaishnavas lying north of Srirampur. Similarly, Chandernagore, Chinsurah (Chunchura), Saptagram and Panduah are described without much detail. This replication of guidebooks' hierarchy was common. Bholanath Chandra's description of Mirzapur as an entrepot having 'no ancient importance' was also borrowed from the guidebooks.<sup>469</sup> Similarly, Gostha Bihari Dhar's account of the 'country between Kanpur and Tundla' matched the corresponding entry in Newman's volume.<sup>470</sup>

Railway guidebooks' influence on the sensibilities of the travelogues can also be discerned on other aspects, most notably, on the idea of benefits of travel and in articulating notions of 'distance' and 'difference'. As hinted already, the idea that apparent leisure activities like travel should be 'useful' was a European import. The notion of travelling as a means to personal 'improvement' was successfully propagated in Europe from the eighteenth century and its role was emphasised as complimentary or contrary to textual knowledge. In this tradition, the pedagogical function of travel meant surpassing one's particular perspective by seeing other lands and people.<sup>471</sup> This belief had its share of critics and was questioned by the issue of incommensurability – how far can others be understood, questioned its credibility. But the importance of empirical experience derived from travel usually outweighed this challenge. It is not without significance that most authors of these travelogues travelled during their vacations and claimed their travels to be a product of their desire to utilise leisure. Travelling, it was argued, broadened horizons by offering possibilities to know the land and its inhabitants. It was also noted to complement textual knowledge. Many authors admired the Grand Tour and even argued for the need to introduce similar practices in India. Such sentiments were evidently borrowed from the guidebooks.

The authors of the travelogues frequently expressed their fascination with passing landscape in terms similar to those used in the guidebooks or in even accounts by European railway travellers. They wondered whether the spell would be broken if they were closer to

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<sup>469</sup> Chunder, 'The travels'.

<sup>470</sup> G. B. Dhar, *Sachitra Tirtha Yatra Vivaran* (Calcutta, 1913).

<sup>471</sup> G. Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as metaphor: from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Minnesota, 1992).

their ‘vision’. Both Kedar Nath Das and Saratchandra Shastri speculated that their fascination with passing scenery of Santhal Parganas might end if they were to move any closer to the Santhals who were seemingly impressed by the speeding train.<sup>472</sup> Onlookers were often noted as adding charm to the scene as they gaped at the ‘iron-horse’. One of the earliest travelogues published in 1863 noted how peasants took a break from their work in the fields to gaze at the train in which the author was travelling, the figures of the peasants were said to make a lovely picture against the rice field. The look of wonder and amazement on the faces of these peasants was duly recorded.<sup>473</sup> Similar ‘scenes’ routinely appear in the travelogues underlining the influence of guidebooks. In a striking example of using ‘distance’ to appreciate vision, Surendranath Ray described his first sighting of Taj Mahal from a railway carriage by wondering if his actual visit to the monument next morning would match up to the first glimpse. Perhaps it was no coincidence that his description corresponded with the one recorded by Rudyard Kipling on his first sight of Taj.<sup>474</sup>

Travelogues also borrowed guidebooks’ sensibilities to articulate ‘difference’ – of landscape and people. Bengali travelogues usually defined differences in landscape between Bengal proper and north India usually by noting changing geographical features. Rajmahal or Teenpahar were the conventional points where the familiar Bengal plains began to give way to the undulated features characteristic of north India, and these areas therefore became the entry point of ‘difference’. In all accounts, the hilly features and drier air of the region were said to convey the feeling of ‘difference’ from Bengal. These descriptions correspond with the guidebooks which ‘celebrated’ moving out of marshy Bengal and the attendant benefits on the physical and mental health of travellers.<sup>475</sup> Descriptions of the physical setting of the NWP and Rajasthan also resembled the guidebooks. Emphasis was laid on the unevenness of the land and differences in vegetation.<sup>476</sup> Similarly, the standardised ethnography of the guidebooks was frequently used to describe ‘difference’ between people belonging to different parts of India. The travelogues routinely describe north Indians as ‘manly’ in

<sup>472</sup> From the distance of the carriage the authors thought the Santhals were impressed, while in reality they might not have been since they had played an important role in the construction of the railway and were also transported by it to work as coolies.

<sup>473</sup> Mukhopadhyay, ‘Railway’.

<sup>474</sup> The only difference being Kipling had his ‘vision’ at dawn while the author at dusk. Between 1887 and 1889 Kipling’s railway travel accounts were published in *Pioneer* and became extremely popular. These reports were later published as part of Wheeler’s *Railway Library*.

<sup>475</sup> Among Europeans, Bengal’s climate was notorious for breeding diseases and weakening constitution in general. This idea of Bengal’s debilitating climate and its effect on its inhabitants led to a perception of Bengalis as weak and effeminate.

<sup>476</sup> Kedar Nath Das, Baradakanta Sengupta, Saratchandra Shastri and Surendranath Ray were among the authors who made such comparisons.

appearance, comparing them favourably with Bengali men. Phrases such as ‘sturdy Marathas’, ‘entrepreneurial Parsis’, ‘indolent Muslims’, and ‘brave Rajputs’ too, were liberally borrowed. As noted in the first section, guidebooks adopted these stereotypes from the government gazetteers. The travelogues therefore not only replicated these ideas, but also disseminated them to a wider audience.<sup>477</sup> It can be argued that the experiences of railway journeys under the influence of the guidebooks were a specifically potent means of conveying these stereotypes and had profound impact on imagining the nation and its people.

This evaluation of ‘difference’ expressed in the travelogues was not merely a product of the imperatives which shaped the content of their literary models. There is evidence of similar differentiation and classification in pre-existing Indian traditions.<sup>478</sup> Moreover, the authors were educated, middle class, urban professionals who were aware of the diversity India had to offer.<sup>479</sup> If anything, railway travel offered them possibilities to re-affirm the information they already had and added new dimensions to the familiar. Ideas of ‘difference’ were sharpened as well as modified. ‘Difference’ came to be graded and compared with a standardised base, and created a hierarchy of more different or less different people.<sup>480</sup> Also, the influence of guidebooks, though wide, was neither random nor indiscriminate. It was based on a selective use of information and sensibilities that created a narrative to convey the experiences (distance, difference) engendered by railway travel. The process of selection is instructive as some ideas and information were appropriated while others were not. Opposing descriptions of Kanpur and the events of 1857 illustrate this point. While appraising 1857, the travelogues, unlike the guidebooks, did not put the burden of guilt squarely on Indians. For instance, after a visit to the mutiny memorial, poet Navinchandra Sen wrote: ‘Kanpur saddens one’s heart, but violence and cruelty [were] inflicted by both sides.’<sup>481</sup> Differences were expressed even on more mundane occasions. Surendranath Ray was disappointed by the ‘mean appearance’ of Alfred Park in Allahabad and noted it as ‘undeserving’ of the praise heaped on it by the EIR guidebook.<sup>482</sup> He was also angry at that guide’s misrepresentation of the condition of *serais* near Etawah station and advised readers to be sceptical of its

<sup>477</sup> Travelogues were popular read. Their popularity can be gauged by the fact that the serialized version of several Bengali travelogues had appeared earlier in newspapers.

<sup>478</sup> D.H. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of Military Labour Market of Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge, 1990); C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the making of Modern India* (New Delhi, 1998).

<sup>479</sup> Most of these authors had travelled to other parts of India in pre-railway days for diverse reasons and knew something about ‘difference’.

<sup>480</sup> The following chapters will discuss this in greater detail.

<sup>481</sup> N. Sen, *Prabaser Patra* (Calcutta, 1875).

<sup>482</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar’.

description. Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri, too, advised his readers not to follow the railway guidebooks' description of *serais* and *dharamsalas*. And in case his advice was not followed, they were asked to be ready to face disappointment and betrayal.<sup>483</sup> On the other hand, his use of the word *pratarana* hints at the usual belief that the guidebooks were a reliable source of information. In general, the appropriated ideas were deployed in diverse contexts and purposes, which again implies a discerning use of the railway guidebooks. The impact of railways on the nature of journeys may offer a clue to this uneven influence of the guidebooks on the travelogues.

### III

This section asks whether the railway changed the reasons people travelled. It certainly came to be used for pilgrimages, as has been noted. Other uses also developed. The extent to which they were new depends partly on how we view journeys before the railways. The role of railways will be assessed by comparing pre and post-railway travelogues. This will bring the impact of railway into sharper focus and will also map the degree of change by identifying elements of continuity. But before that a note on the use of terms 'pre' and 'post' railway as a means to classify these travelogues would be useful. This classification is in contrast to Kumkum Chatterjee's treatment of the pre-railway Bengali travelogues as 'pilgrim narratives' on the ground that these journeys were undertaken 'explicitly' to earn religious merit.<sup>484</sup> While this was certainly the case, I suggest this division is artificial because the practice of pilgrimage was (and is) not incompatible with other activities being undertaken at the same time.<sup>485</sup> Moreover, the classification of 'pilgrim narratives' can be confusing as travelogues claiming to be pilgrim accounts continued to be written well into the twentieth century. A thumbnail sketch of pre-railway travelogues will show that pilgrimage often implied a journey with several purposes. The travelogues used here are: *Tirtha Mangal* by Bijoyram Sen (1769), *Patramalika* by Pandit Ratneshwar (1841), *Tirtha Bhraman* by Jadunath Sarbadhikari (1856/57) and *Maajha Pravas* by Vishnu Bhatt Godshe Versaikar

<sup>483</sup> D.K. Lahiri Chaudhuri, *Bharat Bhraman* (Calcutta, 1910). He used the word *pratarana* (Bengali) lit. betrayal.

<sup>484</sup> Chatterjee, 'Discovering'.

<sup>485</sup> *Mahabharata* especially 'Vana-parva', Bengali edition by Rajsekhar Basu (Calcutta, 1950); also A. Bharati, 'Pilgrimage in Indian tradition', *History of Religions*, 3, 1, 1963.

(1857).<sup>486</sup> Of these, the first and third are in Bengali, while the second is in Hindi and the fourth in Marathi.<sup>487</sup>

The first pre-railway travelogue *Tirtha Mangal* is an account of a pilgrimage undertaken by Krishna Chandra Ghosal, the younger brother of Gokul Chandra Ghosal – an important political figure in mid-eighteenth century Bengal.<sup>488</sup> The author was part of Krishna Chandra's entourage and served as the doctor as well as compiler of the travel experiences. The journey was undertaken because Krishna Chandra had a dream in which Lord Vishwanath, the presiding deity of Benaras, asked him to visit his abode. This dream resulted in the trip up to Benaras including visits to Gaya and Allahabad. The author of the second text, *Patramalika*, travelled alone from Sehere to Bombay, passing through Hoshangabad, Burhanpur, Dhulia, Nashik and Thana. He admits to have undertaken this journey to see the big towns and 'good things' which lay along the way.<sup>489</sup> Our third author claims religious inspiration as the primary motive of travel as he was 'disenchanted' with family life and wanted to acquire religious merit.<sup>490</sup> His account covers whole of the north and parts of western India, his travel coincided with the events of 1857. The 'mutiny' also disrupted the plans of the author of the fourth and final pre-railway travelogue. Vishnu Bhatt was a poor Brahmin who travelled to north India from his village near Bombay with his uncle to earn money by offering religious services to wealthy patrons.<sup>491</sup>

Together these texts present a combination of purposes of travel – pilgrimage, a desire to see 'good things' and the need to earn money - certainly not novel reasons. The stated purpose of their travel did not restrict them from participating in activities which may appear contradictory. En route to Benaras, Krishna Chandra Ghosal, the main protagonist of *Tirtha Mangal*, had a series of engagements with important political figures of the time. These included meetings with the *faujdar* of Rajmahal, the zamindar of Barh, the *subahdar* of Bihar Raja Sitab Rai, the *dewan* of the Tikari Raj, and finally the Raja of Benaras, Balwant Singh. Evidently such meetings and participation in political negotiations were not seen as incompatible with the main aim of his journey (pilgrimage). Sarbadhikari, the author of

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<sup>486</sup> The dates in parentheses indicate the year of composition and their contents will be discussed in this order.

<sup>487</sup> The ones in Bengali and Hindi were read in original, but for the Marathi one I have used the English translation. See, V. B. G. Versaikar, *Maajha Pravas – 1857 cha bandachi hakikat*, Translated by Mrinal Pande, (New Delhi, 2011).

<sup>488</sup> Bijoyram Sen, *Tirtha Mangal*, edited by Nagendranath Basu (Calcutta 1915).

<sup>489</sup> Pandit Ratneshwar, *Patramalika* (Agra, 1841); the text is a compilation of letters written by the author on move to one of his friends. The author uses the word 'achhe padarth', which literally translates as 'good things'.

<sup>490</sup> Jadunath Sarbadhikari, *Tirtha Bhraman* edited by N. Basu (Calcutta, 1915).

<sup>491</sup> Versaikar, 'Maajha'.

*Tirtha Bhraman*, was also involved in things beyond the religious including visiting towns such as Kanpur, Mirzapur and Ludhiana to see the working of factories. An interest in secular things is reflected in Sarbadhikari's 'pilgrim narrative'. It is replete with descriptions of commercial life in the towns visited. It discusses in detail the specialised manufacture of each city, the methods of production, and commercial prospects. Even while attending Magh Mela at Allahabad Sarbadhikari's attention was captured more by vigorous commerce than by religious rituals. In accordance with the non-religious purpose of travel, Pandit Ratnakar, the author of the third pre-railway travelogue *Patramalika* offered only passing comments about pilgrim towns. The fourth pre-railway text again questions any simple classification of such journeys. Its author, an indigent Brahmin in search of employment, not only visited Kashi, Ujjain and Ayodhya, presumably to earn merit and money, but also spent several days in Lucknow, spending all the money he had earned on visiting courtesans each night.

Post-railway travelogues reveal some new purposes and attitudes towards travel. The new purposes include: (i) daily commuting, (ii) leisure, and (iii) recuperating from illness. A Bengali tract published in 1863 underlined how the railway service connecting Calcutta with its suburbs had made daily commuting possible.<sup>492</sup> The tract is in the form of a series of dialogues between women of different age groups comparing the impact of railways on their lives. Railways, according to them, were fun for several reasons: *one*, they made travelling easier and faster; *two*, even gazing at passing trains was an enjoyable distraction; and *finally*, the railway daily brought back their husbands from work. The last reason is treated as the most important one. It is the pivot around which the narrative revolves. The younger women are described as lucky by their older counterparts as they were born in the 'railway age' and never realised pangs of separation from their husbands when they left for work. By making daily commuting possible, the tract argued, railways made women happier. It saved them from pining for their husbands for months on end. The need to travel for work was certainly not new; but it was certainly new to travel to a place of work fifty miles away from ones' home and come back the same day. Later travelogues too, note daily commuting and the role played by railways. While waiting for his train at Howrah station, Surendranath Ray found himself looking at the daily commuters walking across the Howrah Bridge to use the train services. He wondered about their train journey to Calcutta each day for work and returning home exhausted.<sup>493</sup> In another reference, Kedar Nath Das noted the similarity between the

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<sup>492</sup> Azim-Al-Din, *Ki majar kaler gadi* (Calcutta 1863).

<sup>493</sup> Ray, 'Uttar'.



residents of Thana and Kalyan commuting daily to Bombay, and their Bengali counterparts living in Srirampur or Konnagar.<sup>494</sup>

If railways played an important role in bringing people to their place of work, it also took them away from it. The railway network enabled an increasing number of people to travel to different parts of India especially during the long summer vacations or Durga Puja holidays. In *Hutom Penchar Naksha*, the author remarked that the opening of the direct rail link between Calcutta and Allahabad during Durga Puja was a deliberate attempt by the EIR to capture maximum traffic. Judging from the swelling crowd at the station, the author declared the plan successful. Earlier, in an article published in 1860 the author admitted his journey to Rajmahal was partly due to his desire to not spend an uneventful Durga Puja vacation.<sup>495</sup> This description outlines what was to become an integral part of vacation plans – railway travel. The popularity of this practice can be gauged by the fact that many travelogues have a formulaic ‘opening’ in which the authors admitted railway travel as a good or exciting option as it solved their problem of deciding what to do during a vacation. For instance, Kashinath Mukhopadhyay shared his dilemma with the readers by narrating his inability to decide ‘where to go’ during impending Puja vacations.<sup>496</sup> On this occasion he was saved by his friend who had plans to visit Agra and the author decided to accompany him. Travelogues written by Saratchandra Shastri, Kedarnath Das, Baradakanta Sengupta and Fakir Chandra Chatterjee are records of their vacation travel experiences. By the turn of the century railway travel during vacation became a routine, almost a ritual. It seems that railways were successful in establishing travel for leisure as a purpose in its own right. Though here too, in some senses, leisure as a motive for travelling was not new. There were obvious rural (and later urban) traditions whereby people travelled to ancestral villages for particular seasons, rituals, child-birth, health, marriage and old-age. But the relative ease offered by railways surely gave a new kind of motive of travelling for no reason other than pleasure, for a wider range of people, divorcing it from family purposes. Another distinct purpose of travel introduced by railways was ‘change of air’ or travelling to improve one’s health. Travelogues such as *Aryavarta* and *Darjeeling* were products of their authors’ journeys to recover their health.<sup>497</sup>

Post-railway travelogues also reveal new attitudes to travel, which were evidently influenced by the introduction of railways. As travelling became relatively less troublesome

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<sup>494</sup> Das, ‘Bharatbarsher’.

<sup>495</sup> Chakrabarty, ‘My first’.

<sup>496</sup> Mukhopadhyay, ‘Railway’.

<sup>497</sup> P. Devi, *Aryavarta* (Calcutta, 1888) and P. Dube, *Darjeeling* (Calcutta, 1910).

and dangerous, an argument was made in favour of taking advantage of railways to travel more.<sup>498</sup> In other words, travelling was advocated even without any stated purpose. This attitude was certainly novel, and permeates most post-railway travelogues. The Bengali tract on daily commuting captured the mood best, when it argued that railways had even transformed a dreary everyday activity like travelling to work into ‘fun’.<sup>499</sup> Popularisation of travel had perhaps something to do with the publicity which places of tourist attraction received, from the guidebooks and the railway companies on whose network they lay. For instance, writing as early as 1855, Jagmohan Chakrabarty admitted his choice of travel destination was the product of the relentless publicity celebrating the recently opened rail link to Rajmahal. He decided to take the trip because ‘everybody was talking of Rajmehal; every newspaper in the city was brim-full of Rajmehal. The very streets overflowed with notices of Rajmehal printed in the largest type of the Railway Press’.<sup>500</sup> Similarly, the overwhelming response of the public, in booking tickets to Allahabad as soon as the direct rail link opened from Calcutta (1863), was argued to be largely due to the advertisements (in Bengali and English) pasted all over the city by the EIRC.<sup>501</sup> A pamphlet published by the EIRC in the early twentieth century claimed a traveller along the track of the EIRC could find most of the things that ‘the heart of man may desire.’<sup>502</sup> It listed the places which the network boasted, summarised in the following words: ‘the northern sweep of the Himalayas offers rest, sport, scenery or mere recreation and amusement. At the other end is Calcutta, once the darling of the Gods. [In between] those interested in the east of the two thousand years ago may wander contemplatively through antiquity as presented in ruin, shrine or city.’ All major railway lines including the State Railways published pamphlets and guidebooks highlighting ‘places of interest’ on their networks. By the late 1910s a surfeit of advertisements was used to lure prospective travellers. (See figure 1 and 2). The GIPR established a publicity bureau at the Victoria Terminus in 1924.<sup>503</sup> It made wide use of newspapers, booklets and posters for publicity. In 1926-27 the Railway Board decided to establish publicity bureaus on the pattern of GIPR.<sup>504</sup> These were primarily aimed at third class Indian passengers as the pamphlets were published in Indian languages.

<sup>498</sup> Relative because, railway travel could be both uncomfortable and dangerous; see chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>499</sup> Azim, ‘Ki majar’.

<sup>500</sup> Chakrabarty, ‘Travels’

<sup>501</sup> Sinha, ‘Hutom’.

<sup>502</sup> ‘Poojah Holidays: Holidays well planned’, EIRC, 1905, in Pamphlets and Tracts collection, OIOC, P/T 1319.

<sup>503</sup> N. Sanyal, *Development of Indian Railways* (Calcutta, 1930).

<sup>504</sup> Railway Gazette: a journal of transportation, engineering, docks, harbours, contracts and railway news; Special Indian Railway Number, May, 1929, OIOC.

A major consequence of this was standardisation of travel destinations, as is evident in the travelogues. A glance through their contents page confirms that journeys became repetitious. Most travelogues contained accounts of visits to places in northern, central and western India. The standard list included: Rajmahal (Teenpahar), Munger, Patna, Benaras, Allahabad, Kanpur, Lucknow, Agra, Mathura, Brindaban, Delhi, Rajputana, Jabalpur, Nashik and Bombay. Though some travel accounts offer a delightful digression, most conformed to this pattern.<sup>505</sup> This standardisation also encouraged what may be called a 'regional imbalance'. The focus of publicity and the contents of the travelogues reveal a bias towards the Indo-Gangetic plain and some parts of the Bombay Presidency. Writing in 1891, H. Beveridge complained about those who while travelling from Calcutta towards north India preferred the chord line over the loop and missed 'interesting and beautiful things' which every station on the former line possessed.<sup>506</sup> In a similar reference, the compiler of the 1898 edition of the 'Illustrated guide to the Madras Railway' admitted that the object of writing the volume was to induce visitors to extend their researches in the direction of Southern India, which contained many places of interest.<sup>507</sup> The guidebook published by the BNR also alluded to the popularity of the Indo-Gangetic plain. Though the BNR network, its author noted, could not boast of the 'show places of the great Empire', yet it possessed some of the chief attractions of India such as temples of Puri, Bhubaneswar, and Simhachalam, natural wonders like Ranchi, Seoni and the forests of Saranda, and last but not least health resorts like Waltair.<sup>508</sup>

For European tourists, choosing north India was a practical decision. These places could be most easily accessed from Bombay or Calcutta, usually the former, where most European tourists landed.<sup>509</sup> For Indian travellers too, preference for north India was partly a practical choice. The concentration of railway lines in the Indo-Gangetic plain and western India made the region accessible. Most places which appeared regularly in travellers' itineraries were on the main line of two of the major railway lines, the EIR and the GIPR. The rest could be easily reached through one of the major junctions on these networks. Moreover, some places like Patna, Benaras or Allahabad attracted substantial traffic even in pre-railway

<sup>505</sup> Bharatendu, 'Janakpur', S. Prasad *Bharat Bhraman* and D. Lahiri Chaudhuri's Bengali travelogue also titled *Bharat Bhraman*, were exceptions to this rule.

<sup>506</sup> H. Beveridge, 'Notes of a holiday trip to Maldah and Bihar', *Calcutta Review*, 1891, OIOC; the places he listed included Panduah, Gaur, Maldah, Rohtas and Sassaram.

<sup>507</sup> F. Dunsterville, *The Illustrated Guide to the Madras Railway*, (Madras, 1898) OIOC. The author was also the chief auditor of the Madras railway and his anxiety in attracting more traffic to the line is not surprising.

<sup>508</sup> 'Travel in India'.

<sup>509</sup> G. Hutton-Taylor, *Illustrated guide to India and Indian hotels* (Calcutta, 1898).

days, though railway connection certainly magnified the numbers. This regional bias was also affected by the hierarchy of places induced by the guidebooks. For instance, Baradakanta Sengupta admitted that the ruins of Rajmahal became a fixture on the travellers' itinerary largely due to the attention they received in the guidebooks.<sup>510</sup> But easy access, or the influence of a hierarchy of places characterised by interests, fails to explain this regional imbalance. This attraction for north and parts of western India was part of a wider process of re-conceiving the purposes of journeys in India, in which the railway network played a crucial role.

As noted already, the authors of the post-railway travelogues urged their readers travel more. This suggestion however contained an important caveat: not every kind of travelling counted. Travelling had to be 'useful'. In other words, it should lead to improvements like moral upliftment or physical well-being or an acquaintance with the land and its inhabitants, ideally all three. This idea seemingly countered the 'travel for leisure' argument. But a closer reading reveals an interesting formulation. Travel for pleasure was not completely rejected. Rather 'utility' was offered to rationalise pleasure. In other words, travelling for leisure was transformed partially into a project of improvement. The authors of the Bengali travelogues peddled this idea most forcefully.<sup>511</sup> This is not surprising as it was in response to the colonial stereotype of Bengalis which was as much unflattering as deprecatory.<sup>512</sup> These authors skilfully adapted the notion of 'useful' travel in the Indian context and argued Bengalis should follow this practice and travel more.<sup>513</sup> It is not without significance that all authors who travelled during the vacations claimed their plans to travel were a product of their desire to 'utilise' leisure. This re-conceiving of journeys had significant bearing on the attitudes towards travel, leading to its classification as 'useful' or otherwise. Of all kinds, *desh bhraman* or travelling across the country was identified as most useful and was highly recommended for acquiring 'social knowledge'.<sup>514</sup> *Desh bhraman*, it was argued, offered opportunities to visit places which had a bearing on India's past. This peregrination was expected to trigger a thought process about India afflicted with foreign rule, leading to a possible prescription for a different future by 'knowing' the land and her

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<sup>510</sup> Sengupta, 'Bharat'.

<sup>511</sup> Only one Hindi travelogue highlighted the advantages of travelling and meeting new people and knowing their customs. See R. Vyas, *Paribhraman* (Bankipur, 1909).

<sup>512</sup> The average description of a Bengali *baboo* was someone who was weak, effeminate, bookish and averse to any physically challenging activities like travelling.

<sup>513</sup> The idea of importance of travel in the formulation of Bengali identity will be discussed in later chapters.

<sup>514</sup> The knowledge acquired from travelling was usually described as 'samajik jnan' which translates as 'knowledge of society'.

inhabitants. And since in Indian imagination, north India had sacred, mythic and historic associations, travelling across the region therefore became synonymous with *desh bhraman*. Here too, the influence of guidebooks is evident, which defined north India as a territory which shaped the history and fortune of the country. The ruins and forts were claimed to provide a 'picturesque' backdrop to an eventful past, and travelling through the region therefore, offered vicarious historical experiences.

But, as noted in the previous section, the sensibilities of the guidebooks were used with discretion. In this case, the guidebooks claimed a picturesque vision of ruins and abandoned cities, and conveyed that India's greatness lay in her past. Over centuries India had progressively declined, having reached the state of decay and degeneration from which the British were extricating it. The travelogues, too, came quite close to using the ruins for similar aesthetic appeal. For instance, Baradakanta Sengupta's quotation from Byron expressed a desire to be left alone amidst ruins to meditate about: 'fallen states and buried greatness, o'er a land which was mightiest in its old command....wherein were cast the heroic and the free, the beautiful, the brave, the lords of earth and sea.'<sup>515</sup> But Indian travelogues interpreted this historical message with a singular difference. For the authors of these texts, the ruins 'conveyed' that India would once again regain her lost glory and that Indians (not the British) would achieve this objective. The implication of this interpretation was clear: the role of the British in the regeneration of India was peripheral and limited. It also had another distinct element: Indian failings needed reform, to be achieved by recovering evidence of a great past. Authors like Navinchandra Sen, Surendranath Ray, Kedarnath Das, Durgacharan Ray and Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri, all claimed that travelling through the physical evidence of India's past greatness would induce a process of self-reflection and eventual regeneration.

This new attitude towards travel also re-conceived pilgrimage as 'useful', because it led to the accrual of merit, and moral, physical and spiritual upliftment. In addition, through pilgrimage one could 'know' the country as Hindu sacred sites were scattered all over India. In other words, pilgrimage was yet another kind of *desh bhraman*, and evidence of which was traced back to the days of Ramayan and Mahabharat. The peripatetic lives of people like Shankaracharya, Madhavacharya and Chaitanya were cited to validate the existence of a tradition of 'useful' travel in India, and the railway was argued to have revived this tradition which had perished during the Muslim interregnum. This emphasis on rationalising pleasure

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<sup>515</sup> Sengupta, 'Bharat'.

is also evident in the denunciation of those who travelled for no ‘useful’ purposes. Lalitmohan Moitra, for instance, criticised ‘change seekers’, who flocked to places like Chunar or Munger for no stated reasons. He lamented the gradual decline of a tradition of pilgrimage which conveniently fused pleasure and religious merit.<sup>516</sup> Though this complaint underlines the presence of people who travelled for pleasure, it also illustrates the ways in which attitudes to travel were re-conceived.

As hinted earlier, the idea that even apparent leisure activities like travel should be ‘useful’ was a European import. It entered India through various means including the guidebooks. As the guidebooks of the period were influenced by romantic notions, these sensibilities also seeped into the travelogues. The idea that human feelings are important and constitutive of reality, and hence that impressions from travel matter, was a romantic idea, and is evidently present in the travelogues. It is also linked with the emphasis on the role of the empirical experience of travel as especially informative to understanding culture – one’s own, and others’.<sup>517</sup> This sensibility influenced notions of what constituted one’s own and the ways in which it could be differentiated. Travel, therefore, offered a possibility of knowing through empirical experience. Coinciding with the introduction of railways within the colonial context, this sensibility played a crucial role in exploring notions of identity. Not surprisingly, this had far reaching implications, as the authors of the travelogues grappled with the awareness and redefinition of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

This chapter has suggested ways in which the railways transformed the nature of journeys in colonial India by drawing upon two distinct sources: the railway guidebooks and the travelogues. It has shown the impact of railway in fixing the travel network, in standardising travel destinations, and in introducing new forms of journey while re-configuring the existing ones. It has also underlined the significance of the introduction of railways to re-conceived meanings of journeys in colonial India. Its impact was mediated through the guidebooks and travelogues which concretised and disseminated these ideas. The examination of these two distinct textual sources has shown the role of these texts to be more critical and wider than hitherto suggested. It has also highlighted the influence of the guidebooks in shaping ideas of travel and aesthetics. The evidence of their overlapping with or even borrowing from the guidebooks questions the earlier notion that these texts had impact only on a limited audience. It shows the dynamic effect of this process on Indians and

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<sup>516</sup> L.M. Moitra, *Tirtha Yatra Vivaran* (Rajshahi, 1909).

<sup>517</sup> M. N. Forster (Ed), *Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 2002).

their imagining of journeys. In addition, it brings out the diverse and even contradictory impulses which shaped the travelogues.

Finally, this influence was never total and exhibited a careful selection of ideas and information; despite being influenced by the guidebooks, the travelogues also differed from them in crucial ways. Also though the advent of railway popularised new forms of travel, yet it essentially remained an upper class and middle class phenomenon. As the second chapter argued, the price of tickets was not low for many who wanted to access the railways. Along with other costs of travelling (lodging, food and so on) this kept travelling essentially as an activity for people with means. In other words, travel for pleasure with or without rationalisation remained beyond means of many. Underlining the link between money and travel, Fakir Chandra Chatterjee in his travelogue shared a childhood memory when his mother explained their inability to go to Deoghar during summer vacation because they were ‘not rich’.<sup>518</sup> Perhaps this also offers a clue to explain why pilgrimage, with the flexibility it offered to combine several pursuits continued to be the most visible form of journeying. Nonetheless, this chapter has underlined the impact of railways on the nature of journeys in colonial India, and has hinted at the possible implications of these transformations. The re-conceiving of journeys altered the relationship between railway travellers and their surroundings. One of the consequences of this process was a re-imagining of the land. The next chapter will discuss the relation between railway journeys and the imagination and differentiation of space.

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<sup>518</sup> Chatterjee, ‘Pathar’.

## Chapter Six

### *Railways and the creation of 'national' space*

This chapter will examine the creation of a homogenised 'national' space with reference to the role of the railways. For analytical convenience, 'national' space has been divided into two distinct units: the socio-political and the economic; the former primarily represents conceptualisations of territory; and the latter the actual physical space through which humans and commodities moved. The decision to look simultaneously at these processes is deliberate, as hitherto the railways have been thought crucial to the transition from a historically and culturally neutral landscape to a homogenised regional or national space.<sup>519</sup> This historical process has been also argued to be reflected in the Bengali and Hindi travelogues of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. These texts, it is claimed, exhibit an awareness of India as a geographical and political entity which was a product of the colonial spatial restructuring and also indicative of the economic and political homogenisation of a previously differentiated national territory.<sup>520</sup> Useful as these analyses are, they overlook the following aspects. *One*, the re-organisation of territory during colonial rule was a long process and in many cases it retained pre-colonial territorial organisation. *Two*, the awareness of India or its various parts as distinct territorial formations was not just a product of colonial knowledge; the authors of the travelogues reveal a geographical awareness which is complex, conveying notions from earlier traditions. And *three*, differentiation continued to remain an important aspect of imagining and experiencing space in colonial India. This chapter will assess the role of railways in these processes. It will also evaluate the implications for India. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first is about socio-political 'national space'; the analysis is based primarily on the travelogues. The second focuses on the economic, and relies on official sources.

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<sup>519</sup> S. Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: the East India Company and the making of the colonial marketplace* (Philadelphia, 1998); Goswami, 'Producing'.

<sup>520</sup> Chatterjee, 'Discovering' Bury, 'Geographies'.



## I

As noted in the previous chapter, railway operations played a crucial role in transforming attitudes towards travel in colonial India. Travelling came to be regarded as a useful practice, and, of all kinds, *desh bhraman* was prescribed as the most beneficial. Advantages that accrued from *desh bhraman* included improving knowledge and improving character and attitudes. Travelling would enable the observation of the customs, manners and lifestyle of people living in different parts of the country. This acquaintance was claimed to curtail narrowness of knowledge and attitudes. Moreover, *desh bhraman* allowed learning about the ancient history and traditions of the land. For instance, Dinanath Gangopadhyay admitted travelling improved his knowledge.<sup>521</sup> Similarly, Surendranath Ray claimed *desh bhraman* satiated curiosity, and offered peace of mind; it provided limitless possibilities of acquiring knowledge and experience.<sup>522</sup> Baradakanta Sengupta argued that *desh bhraman* led to opening of mind, as one could see and hear new things.<sup>523</sup> The author of *Tirtha-Darshan* advocated travelling across the country as a way of improving the soul.<sup>524</sup> Without it, he claimed, no one ever acquired wisdom and knowledge. Purna Chandra Basu felt travelling had a positive impact especially on young minds and bodies.<sup>525</sup> And for Gostha Bihari Dhar, travelling around the country was a definite way of achieving self-realisation and progress.<sup>526</sup> So sanguine were the authors about the benefits of *desh bhraman* that they prescribed the reading of travelogues to those who could not travel mainly due to lack of sufficient resources.

Moreover, these authors claimed, by easing the conditions of travel, railways had offered an unprecedented opportunity for *desh bhraman*. This, they argued, should not be wasted. Further, travelling was argued to be an integral part of peoples' lives in India which had declined since the advent of the Muslim rule. For these authors, most Muslim rulers being 'Hindu haters' were not interested in either preserving or promoting the 'tradition' of travel, and also failed to provide safe transit to travellers. These factors led to a decline in the number of travellers, and eventually only two kinds of people chose to travel – those who were old or those who lacked familial or affective ties. To highlight the changes brought about by the railways, these texts compared the conditions of travel between pre-railway and

<sup>521</sup> D.N. Gangopadhyay, *Vivadha Darshan Kavya* (Calcutta, 1877).

<sup>522</sup> S.N. Ray *Uttar-Paschim Bhraman* (Calcutta, 1907).

<sup>523</sup> B. Sengupta, *Bharat Bhraman* (Calcutta, undated).

<sup>524</sup> B. Basu, *Tirtha Darshan* (Calcutta, 1891).

<sup>525</sup> P.C. Basu, *A journey through upper India* (Calcutta, 1887) in OIOC 'Tracts' Volume 696, OIOC.

<sup>526</sup> G.B. Dhar, *Sachitra Tirtha Bhraman Kahini* (Calcutta, 1913).

post railway days. Interestingly, this comparison made a clear distinction between pre-colonial and pre-railway travel experiences. For these authors, better travelling conditions were a product of Pax Britannica. The introduction of railways was seen as part of a continuum which included the construction of all-weather roads, the introduction of steam-boats on some of the major rivers, and the establishment of police posts at specific intervals along important roads. In other words, travelling became safer and easier in two phases: *one*, with the establishment of the British rule and the end of Muslim ‘unruliness’; and *two*, with the introduction of the railways.

A tract published in 1855 had a lengthy description of the state of the highways before the establishment of the East India Company rule.<sup>527</sup> For its author, the description of the condition of roads and means of transport in the *Puranas* was a sufficient reflection of the state of affairs during the ‘Hindu period’. But in the ‘Muslim period’, he noted: ‘the conditions of the roads became miserable, bands of robbers and wild animals infested the roads and people were compelled to travel on foot.’ These problems, he argued, kept most people at home. Most authors described pre-colonial travel experiences in similar terms. It would be easy to attribute this denigration of Muslim rule to an internalisation and acceptance of British accusations of Muslim anarchy; but doing so would ignore vital evidence which points towards the existence of ideas based on pre-colonial notions of religious difference (even antagonism).<sup>528</sup> For these authors, therefore, the absence of a culture of travel in pre-colonial India (the ‘Muslim’ period) was purely circumstantial. The ‘remarkable interest’ in railway travelling was argued to be a vindication of this claim which showed Indians’ inclination for travel if provided with the requisite infrastructure.

The connection between this repeated emphasis on *desh bhraman* and its possible implications in the context of the late nineteenth century India seems fairly self-evident, and has received scholarly attention.<sup>529</sup> It is sufficient here to say that these ideas were part of a wider formulation which aimed at instilling a sense of pride and achievement in India’s past. They were also conveniently linked to the idea of self-improvement through the accumulation of knowledge – an integral component of ‘useful’ travel. For instance, Surendranath Ray argued that *arya gaurav* which once illuminated Europe and Africa, was all but extinguished,

<sup>527</sup> K. Moitra, *The steam engine and the East Indian Railway*, (Serampore, 1855).

<sup>528</sup> R.K. Ray, *The Felt Community: commonality and mentality before the emergence of India nationalism* (Delhi, 2002); also P. Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (London, 1994).

<sup>529</sup> S. Kaviraj, *Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the formation of nationalist discourse in India* (Delhi, 1995); T. Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: art in colonial and postcolonial India* (New York, 2004); Chatterjee, ‘Discovering’.

though its residual glow was saving India from plunging into complete darkness. Readers were told about how Ray had aspired to visit those sites of ancient achievement ever since he was an adolescent. He described the date of his journey to north India as a memorable day of his life, that, felt as if he was moving towards a 'kingdom of peace.'<sup>530</sup>

Apart from these rather evident connections, the crucial point in the prescription of 'travel-as-education' was the idea of *desh*. The readers of the travelogues were urged to 'see *desh*'; but what exactly did that mean? This hitherto overlooked point should be investigated because *desh* was the pre-requisite of *desh bhraman*, which allows us to examine the creation of a homogenised 'national' space.<sup>531</sup> Interestingly, if taken literally, the word *desh bhraman* in most of these travelogues is misleading. While the authors claimed these texts as products of their *desh bhraman*, most often these were accounts of travel to north India (the Indo-Gangetic plain) and at times to parts of central and western India. Even the travelogues ambitiously titled *Bharat Bhraman* more often than not were confined to the same region.<sup>532</sup> Judging by the travel destinations, there appears to be a discrepancy between *desh* as envisaged by these authors and the actual geographical contours of India. As argued in the previous chapter, the choice of travel destinations was a result of two factors: *one*, railway routing, which made north India more accessible; and *two*, a deliberate choice, indicative of a conceptualisation of territory which cannot be reduced to the colonial. Most of these authors avowedly chose north India because it had mythical, religious and historical significance. They often used the word *Aryavarta* to describe the region. While most scholars argue that the use of the word *Aryavarta* as indicative of an Orientalist or colonial influence; it needs to be underlined that it was not an Orientalist creation. It was a much older notion which was revived by the Orientalists.<sup>533</sup> That this territorial conceptualisation had a long lineage was made plain in a travelogue published in 1870 appositely titled *The Aryavarta or northern India*.<sup>534</sup> The author of this tract quoted from Manusmriti to define the geographical limits of *Aryavarta* in the following terms: 'Aryavarta punyabhumi radhyam Vindhya Himalayah' – the Aryavarta is the sacred land between the Vindhya and the Himalayan ranges. He further defined the term by explaining the meaning of *Aryavarta* as a compound of *arya* or upper

<sup>530</sup> Ray, 'Uttar Paschim'.

<sup>531</sup> The word pre-requisite has been used in a strictly logical sense. One cannot possibly travel around the country if it or at least the idea of it did not exist.

<sup>532</sup> Notable exception to this trend was the travelogues by Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri and Sadhucharan Prasad.

<sup>533</sup> T. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley, 1997).

<sup>534</sup> L.L. Pandit, 'The Aryavarta or northern India', A lecture delivered before the Madras Native Gentlemen on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1869; Benaras, 1870, Tracts OIOC Volume 607, OIOC.

classes of Hindus and *avarta* or country. Moreover, it was *punyabhumi* – the presence of holy rivers, mountains and pilgrim centres that endowed it with sacral attributes.

Not surprisingly, for many authors, one of the reasons for visiting north India was to see the holy places scattered across the region. This attraction was not just religious. *Aryavarta* was chosen for its historic significance and connections, for containing those sites of the historical actions that determined India's past and consequently shaped her present. Prasannamayi Devi declared her preference for *Aryavarta* by claiming India's glorious history was no myth.<sup>535</sup> She argued: 'the mountain ranges of the Himalayas and the Vindhya were silent witness to this history and the Ganges, the Yamuna and the Sarayu continue to lament its [India's] fate. The ruins of Ayodhya, Hastinapur and Indraprastha bore past memories of this scared land. Similarly, Surendranath Ray claimed all Bengalis desperately wanted to visit north India because it was the site of India's past glory'.<sup>536</sup> Similarly, authors like Baradakanta Sengupta, Navinchandra Sen, Saratchandra Shastri, Kedarnath Das, Durgacharan Rakshit and Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri admitted travelling around *Aryavarta* for a glimpse of India's past. Even if we discount the excesses of these expressions in favour of north India, two related and significant ideas emerge: *one*, a territorial conceptualisation of *desh*; and *two*, a specific view of history unfolding within *desh*. For the moment, our focus will be on the first of these two ideas.

Interestingly, in some cases the authors used the term *Aryavarta* interchangeably with *Hindustan*. This use is significant because not only did it bring together two territorial conceptualisations from two distinct historical periods, but also it glossed over a few centuries of evolution of the meanings associated with the word *Hindustan*. The earlier notion of *Hindustan* was related to the description by the Muslims to define the conquered land across the Indus and eventually it began to mean a territory inhabited by Indians, mostly Hindus. Abul Fazl's gazetteer of the Mughal Empire and its *subahs* make it plain that *Hindustan* was a concept both wider and older than the Mughal Empire, though it excluded peninsular India.<sup>537</sup> By the late Mughal and Company period this notion of *Hindustan* had also been invested with substantial 'emotional meaning'; that was once just a geographical expression also came to be endowed with political and cultural meanings.<sup>538</sup> Then, with the expansion and consolidation of East India Company rule, the notion of *Hindustan*

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<sup>535</sup> P. Devi, *Aryavarta: Janoiko Banga Mahilar Bhraman Kahini* (Calcutta 1888).

<sup>536</sup> Ray, 'Uttar.'

<sup>537</sup> Ray, 'The Felt'.

<sup>538</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Origins of nationality in South Asia: patriotism and ethical Government in the making of Modern India* (New Delhi, 2001).

increasingly came to convey a rather restricted geographical area situated between Punjab and Bengal. This moving away from the earlier idea of *Hindustan* as a wider geographical entity is perhaps best reflected in the maps, titles and the regional focus of the early gazetteers of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, from being a rather flexible term *Hindustan* had acquired a more precise definition. But, despite this, the word continued to be widely used as a short-hand for northern and central India. It is instructive that, writing in the late nineteenth century, Vishnu Bhatt repeatedly used *Hindustan* to denote his proposed travel to any place beyond Pune. When told about possible employment opportunities in the courts of the rulers of Gwalior, Jhansi and Ujjayani, Benaras and Mathura, he decided to ‘risk a long journey to Hindustan.’<sup>539</sup> In the travelogues, the word *Hindustan* conveys both meanings. In some cases it was used to denote the territorial re-configuration brought by colonial spatial re-ordering, while in some, like Vishnu Bhatt, *Hindustan* is used to mean a wider territory. At times both meanings were used in a single text without any attempt at differentiation.<sup>540</sup> Moreover, as noted already, the use of *Hindustan* was not exclusive; rather, it was used less than or interchangeably with *Aryavarta*. For instance, Surendranath Ray thought a visit to *Hindustan* was a reminder of ‘Aryan glories and achievements.’<sup>541</sup>

The idea of *desh* conveyed through these travelogues, therefore, was more or less restricted to northern India. This questions the assumption that the geographical entity of India as imagined by these authors was primarily a product of colonial rule. More importantly, this conceptualisation did not preclude the possibility of using other, even conflicting territorial imaginings. This is most clearly discernible in the occasional use of the word *Bharat* or *Bharatvarsha* to convey a territorial concept wider than either *Aryavarta* or *Hindustan*; and yet not in opposition to the former. In other words, even while conceptualising northern India as *desh*, it was possible to imagine and indeed claim a wider geographical entity. The use of the word *Bharat* was invariably accompanied by a description of the physical and natural features of the land denoting its wider geographical contours. For instance, Dharanikanta Lahiri Chaudhuri argued that travelling around *Bharat* was beneficial because it was a land of unsurpassed natural beauty. He noted: ‘is there any other country in this world as beautiful as Bharat? It is a land bound by the awe-inspiring and snow covered summits of the Himalayan range; the rivers – Ganges, Kaveri, Indus, Godavari, Yamuna and

<sup>539</sup> Versaikar, ‘Maajha’.

<sup>540</sup> K.N. Das, *Bharatbarsher Pratichi Digvihar* (Murshidabad, 1872) and S. Shastri, *Dakshinapath Bhraman* (Murshidabad, 1898).

<sup>541</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar’.

Brahmaputra water its plains; while dense forests; ruins of ancient cities and pilgrim centres scattered all over solemnly declare Bharat's status to the world as divinely blessed'.<sup>542</sup> Hyperbole aside, this description illustrates the territorial boundaries encapsulated in the word *Bharat*.

Sadhucharan Prasad also used the presence of the seas on three sides and the mountains on another to describe the geographical contours of *Bharat*.<sup>543</sup> The manager of the Great Bengal Circus was critical of the 'prevalent practice' whereby travellers, after touring north India, came back 'home' (*swadesh*) and boasted having 'seen desh'.<sup>544</sup> As a corrective, he suggested people should venture out beyond north India and offered a list of places scattered across India which should be visited by travellers. This territorial conceptualisation was no doubt influenced by the geographical information imparted through the school and university curriculum. But it was also based upon pre-existing knowledge which was the textbooks corroborated. Diana Eck's recent research may offer a useful analytical tool to understand the significance of these pre-existing geographical conceptualisations.<sup>545</sup> Eck argues for a particular idea of India which was shaped by the extensive and intricate interrelation of geography and mythology. She notes the ways in which networks of pilgrimage places composed a sense of location and belonging – locally, regionally and trans-regionally. In other words, Eck makes a strong case for a geographical awareness existing among Indians pre-dating the colonial attempts to instruct them about the landscape. It is instructive that the idea of *Bharat* as a land between the seas and the mountain was mentioned in Mahabharat. In the epic the following quote from Vishnu Purana is used to describe the territorial limits of *Bharatvarsha*: '*Uttaram yatsamudrasya himādreścaiva dakṣiṇam, varṣam tadbhārataṁ nāma bhārātī yatra santatiḥ*.' (The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called *Bhārataṁ*; there dwell the descendants of Bharata).<sup>546</sup>

A standard element of the description of India in the *Puranas* divided it into five regions: the middle country (Madhyadesh) of the Gangetic plain, the North Country or Northern road (Uttarapatha), South or the Southern Road (Dakshinapath), the East (Prachya) and the West (Aparanta).<sup>547</sup> That these words continued to influence territorial

<sup>542</sup> Lahiri Chaudhuri, 'Bharat'.

<sup>543</sup> Prasad, 'Bharat bhraman'.

<sup>544</sup> Professor Bose *r apurva Bhraman Vrittanta* (Calcutta, 1879) OIOC.

<sup>545</sup> D.L. Eck, *India: a sacred geography* (New York, 2012).

<sup>546</sup> *Vishnu Purana*, translated by H.H. Wilson (London, 1840).

<sup>547</sup> Eck, 'India'.

conceptualisations can be gleaned by their use in texts from different periods. For instance, writing in the late sixteenth century, Banarasidas used Madhyadesh to situate the land of his birth. He defined the region by quoting Manusmriti as ‘the land bounded by the Himalayas to the north, the Vindhya Mountains to the south, the city of Prayag to the east and the Sarhind desert in the west.’<sup>548</sup> Approximately three centuries later, the authors of these travelogues also used *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapath* to define the territorial limits of their travels.

But, despite conceptualising *Bharat* as a singular geographical entity, the authors also referred to smaller, distinct territorial zones as the *desh* of specific groups of people. Saratchandra Shastri used the word ‘natives of this country’ to describe people of the Pune and Bombay region.<sup>549</sup> Similarly, Surendranath Ray and Kedarnath Das wrote about Maratha and Rajput *desh*. Both Navinchandra Sen and Baradakanta Sengupta described Rajputana as the *desh* of the Rajput *jati*.<sup>550</sup> Evidently, these writers were undisturbed by the contradictions these definitions posed to the imagination of *Bharat* as a singular, territorial whole. But this should not be taken as either inconsistency or incomplete colonial training. Rather, the places which were identified as separate territorial units had a long history of being considered so.<sup>551</sup> It is no coincidence that Maharashtra and Rajasthan were most often described as *desh* with distinct socio-cultural and ethnic attributes. This brings out a familiarity with these ‘local patriotisms’ as also with indigenous traditions of territory. When referring to Maratha or Rajput *desh* the authors of these travelogues were drawing upon notions of homeland with clear ideas of boundaries and loyalties from pre-colonial territories. These conceptualisations also helped to define and demarcate *desh* from *swadesh*; the latter usually denoting the local or regional. This conceptualisation was defined by several markers such as notions of proximity and distance, geographical features of the landscape, and the linguistic and physical attributes of the inhabitants of different regions.

Most authors expressed the idea of *swadesh* in terms of differences in the physical features of land. Baradakanta Sengupta claimed to have realised the pleasures of *desh bhraman* as soon as his train reached Teenpahar.<sup>552</sup> This emphasis on the spontaneity of

<sup>548</sup> *Ardhakathanak* – a half story by Banarasidas, trans. R. Chowdhury (New Delhi, 2007).

<sup>549</sup> Shastri, ‘Dakshinapath’.

<sup>550</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’ and N. Sen, Prabaser Patra (Calcutta, 1875).

<sup>551</sup> For a discussion on Maratha and Rajput nationalism see, S. Gordon, *The Marathas: 1600 – 1880* (Cambridge, 1993); S. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: revolution and reform in the making of Modern India* (New Delhi, 1977); and N. Peabody, ‘Tod’s Rajasthan and the boundaries of Imperial rule in 19<sup>th</sup> century India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 1, 1996.

<sup>552</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

feelings is instructive because in terms of physical features the region around Teenpahar is different from the plains of Bengal. It was therefore capable of evoking a sense of difference. In addition, Sengupta noted Rajmahal as the 'traditional' meeting-point of Bihar and Bengal. This usage also hints at an awareness of earlier territorial demarcations because, in A'in-i-Akbari, Rajmahal is the boundary of Bengal proper as against *subah-i-Bangalah* - a much wider area.<sup>553</sup> Haricharan Bandyopadhyay found Deoghar and its surroundings distinct from 'our desh' because the land was undulating and full of stones.<sup>554</sup> Similarly, Surendranath Ray noted that, on reaching Patna, the difference with Bengal had become remarkable.<sup>555</sup> He was struck by the absence of greenery and felt that unlike in *swadesh*, the villages in this region were not ensconced within thick foliage. As he moved further west, the author realised that the difference with Bengal was becoming more pronounced especially in terms of undulating landscape and scarcity of water. Though admittedly enjoying '*desh bhraman* through *Aryavarta*', he finally felt at peace only after coming back to '*swadesh* - the beautiful and verdant *banga-bhumi*'.<sup>556</sup> For Kedarnath Das the entry into Santhal Parganas brought an end to the 'familiar and comforting scenes of *swadesh*'.<sup>557</sup>

Thus the notion of *swadesh* expressed in these texts was firmly rooted in territorial conceptualisations, some of which were also drawn from pre-colonial traditions. For instance, the idea of 'golden Bengal' - a fertile and bountiful land was not new. It had been peddled by the local poets and religious movements in Bengal at least since the seventeenth century.<sup>558</sup> What was new, though not recent, was an awareness of the colonial stereotype which identified Bengal's physical features having a debilitating impact on the health and the character of its inhabitants. It is instructive that the authors chose to conceptualise the Bengal *swadesh* as a verdant region, as opposed to drier parts of north India. This conceptualisation, it can be argued, was not just an imagination and realisation of territorial boundaries made possible by railway travel, but an explicit political act aimed at subverting the received image of Bengal.

This co-existence of multiple conceptualisations of territory questions the assumption that the historical production of national space by the colonial state was already fairly

<sup>553</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Translated by H.F. Blochmann (Calcutta, 1927).

<sup>554</sup> H. Bandyopadhyay, *Bhraman Vrittanta* (Calcutta, 1877)

<sup>555</sup> Ray, 'Uttar'.

<sup>556</sup> Idem.

<sup>557</sup> Das, 'Bharatbarsher'.

<sup>558</sup> Bayly, 'Origins' also R. Jones, 'Dreaming of a Golden Bengal: discontinuities of place and identity in South Asia', *Asian Studies Review*, 35, September 2011.



complete.<sup>559</sup> It hints that there was less homogenisation and a more varied impact from colonial intervention than hitherto suggested. In addition, it brings out the continued influence and familiarity with indigenous conceptualisations of territory and their use in diverse contexts. Nowhere is this more visible than in the practice of using alternate names for places, often borrowed from mythological epics. Saratchandra Shastri used names from Ramayan and Mahabharat alongside 'modern' nomenclature to describe places he passed through. For instance, Raipur was *Koshala Rajya*, Khandwa, *Khandava-vana*, the Chambal River, *Charamavati*, Ujjayani, *Matsya desa*, and so on.<sup>560</sup> While this can be seen as an attempt by a Sanskrit teacher to acquaint the readers with the mythical geography, his case, though extreme, was not unique. Most authors, while sharing information about the places of their visit also mentioned earlier names and events associated with them. The practice was not confined to pilgrim centres or to places which were prominent in mythologies and epics. It was extended to places such as Agra, Lucknow, Simla and Darjeeling. Thus Agra became *Agravan*, Lucknow, *Lakshmanavati*, Simla, *Shyamala Khestra* and Darjeeling, *Durjay-ling*. Evidently, this was an attempt to create a map of India - an alternate territorial conceptualisation, consciously drawing upon not just a pre-colonial but a pre-Muslim past. It is instructive that authors like Prasannamayee Devi or Navinchandra Sen argued that Agra's association with the Mughals led to an erasure of its importance as 'Agravan' - a territory leading towards Brindaban and by definition therefore a part of the sacred territory of *Braj*. This identity of Agra, authors claimed, had been long forgotten and should be renewed and celebrated.<sup>561</sup> Similarly, Lucknow was noted as *Lakshmanavati*, named after its founder Lakshman, and lying adjacent to Ayodhya, the city of Ram.<sup>562</sup> There appears to be a pattern here which is hard to overlook. It brings back the issue of the relation between territorial conceptualisation and a specific view of India's past. As noted earlier, the idea of *Aryavarta* played a significant role in the conceptualisation of *desh*. *Aryavarta*'s importance lay not just in the pilgrim centres dotted over the land, or the sacred rivers which flowed through it; the importance came also from those sites which were characterised by Hindu glory and achievements.

This link was made plain by the choice of destinations and the descriptive notes about these places. Prasannamayee Devi admitted choosing only those sites which were associated with *Arya* (Hindu) past; while Surendranath Ray harped on the significance of visiting north

<sup>559</sup> Bury, 'Geographies', Goswami, 'Producing'.

<sup>560</sup> Shastri, 'Dakshinapath'.

<sup>561</sup> Sen, 'Prabaser'; Devi, 'Aryavarta'.

<sup>562</sup> Sen, 'Prabaser'; Devi, 'Aryavarta'; Ray, 'Uttar Paschim'; Lahiri Chaudhuri, 'Bharat'.

India to witness and recover a history ignored in the textbooks. Justifying his choice of travel destinations, Ray quoted R.C. Dutt, and argued that the amateur historian was correct in claiming: ‘a visit to north India is an education which our schools do not impart, it tells a history which our textbooks do not record.’<sup>563</sup> Navinchandra Sen thought Lucknow appeared as ‘an abyss of despair for Muslims’, though he could visit the city without being affected.<sup>564</sup> The fall of Lucknow, the banishment of its ruler to Calcutta and his loss of sovereignty, he argued, did not indicate any political loss because India and Indians [Hindus] had lost their independence much earlier. For him, it was at Indraprastha [Delhi] where ‘India’ lost her freedom. While visiting Delhi, he wrote: ‘here Prithviraj fell at the hands of his adversaries; India’s destiny was ruined forever and Prithviraj’s fall signalled India’s loss of independence.’<sup>565</sup> Durgacharan Ray noted Delhi’s earlier existence as Indraprastha – the capital of Yudisthir. The lack of material remains of Indraprastha, the author argued was a result of Muslims having used it to build mosques and monuments. In addition, after a careful examination of Qutb Minar’s architecture, the author declared it to be a ‘Hindu achievement cunningly appropriated by the Muslims.’<sup>566</sup>

At one level, such interpretations, as Sunil Kumar has argued, was a product of reading ‘authoritative’ texts which were produced from the mid-nineteenth century onwards by Indians influenced by the positivistic historiographical methodologies of the West.<sup>567</sup> In the case of Qutb, this was certainly true, as Syed Ahmad Khan, in his attempt to present ‘only correct and sober facts’ in his text *Asar-Al-Sanadid*, claimed that the minaret was not named after the Sufi saint Qutb-al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, but the military commander Qutb-l-Din Ai-Beg. Consequently, the term used for Qutb Minar viz. Qubbat al-Islam (sanctuary of Islam) was transformed into Quwwat al-Islam (might of Islam).<sup>568</sup> Given this, it is not surprising that Durgacharan Ray or other visitors interpreted the monument in sectarian terms. Though evidently such production of knowledge left little space for alternate narratives, at another level, it needs to be argued that the sentiments expressed by these authors drew upon notions which had deeper and longer lineages.<sup>569</sup>

If the ruins of Delhi were reminder of a contested past then Rajputana represented a valiant tradition of withstanding Muslim ‘aggression’. Various principalities of Rajputana

<sup>563</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar’.

<sup>564</sup> Sen, ‘Prabaser’.

<sup>565</sup> Idem.

<sup>566</sup> D. Ray, *Debganer Martye Agaman* (Calcutta, 1885).

<sup>567</sup> S. Kumar, *The Present in Delhi’s Past* (New Delhi, 2002).

<sup>568</sup> Idem.

<sup>569</sup> Van Der Veer, ‘Religious’, Ray, ‘The Felt’.

especially the fort of Chittor were a fixed destination in the itinerary of these authors. Baradakanta Sengupta and his companion spent sleepless nights in anticipation of their visit to Chittor. They were thrilled to imagine themselves within the precincts of the fort ‘which challenged the might of the Mughal Empire.’<sup>570</sup> Navinchandra Sen described Chittor as a ‘*maha tirtha*.’<sup>571</sup> A *darshan* of Chittor, he claimed would make his life worth living. The derelict structure of the Chittor fort saddened Surendranath Ray. For him the fall of Chittor signified India’s loss of freedom and glory.<sup>572</sup> It was symbolic of the loss of independence suffered by people of Rajputana who had a history of freedom and of fighting for it against Muslim domination. Not surprisingly, parts of Maharashtra, especially the places associated with Shivaji, received similar attention. Descriptions of the temples of Mathura, Brindaban and Benaras were also routinely accompanied by stories of the brutalities perpetrated by Muslim rulers in Hindu pilgrim centres.<sup>573</sup>

Imagined thus, *desh* became an aggregation of sites deriving identity and legitimacy from resisting the Muslim ‘aggression’ or rule. And *desh bhraman* therefore consisted of travelling to specific sites in order to encounter an exclusively Hindu past. Moreover, by implication, this conceptualisation of *desh* left out peninsular India, and this truncated version was peddled as the ideal template for *desh bhraman*. More importantly, this imagination denied Muslims any share in the history and geography of the nation.<sup>574</sup> The use of the word *Aryavarta* not only left out Muslims, but also referred to a putative and dubious claim of superior racial status for high-caste Hindus, thereby also leaving out low-castes from this imagined *desh*. Given this, it is not surprising that the manager of the ‘Great Bengal Circus’ chided fellow Bengalis for visiting only the ‘artificial creations’ of the Muslim rulers like the Taj Mahal and Sikandra in Agra, Jumma Masjid and Qutb Minar in Delhi and Machhi Bhavan and Hussainabad in Lucknow. He lamented the lack of interest in the beautiful structures made by the Hindus and the consequent lack of pride in the achievements of ‘our ancestors.’ He even offered an alternate list of places which were to remind visitors of ‘Hindu achievements’. It included temples at Bhubaneswar, Srirangam, the Uday Sagar Lake and Simhachalam in Vizagapatam. While this allegation brings out the fact that some travellers spent time visiting ‘Muslim’ monuments and that implies journeys might have been more

<sup>570</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>571</sup> Sen, ‘Prabaser’.

<sup>572</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar’.

<sup>573</sup> ‘Aryavarta’, ‘Uttar-Paschim’, ‘Debganer’.

<sup>574</sup> A. Parasher-Sen (Ed), *Subordinate and Marginal groups in Early India* (New Delhi, 2007); B.P. Sahu, ‘Brahmanical Ideology, Regional Identities and the construction of Early India’, *Social Scientist*, 29, 7/8 (July-August 2001) pp. 3-18.

neutral in their impact on ideas, it is significant that the author called for a correction of this trend.

Railways played a crucial but limited role in this conceptualisation of territories. An integral component of 'knowing *desh*' was to be familiar with the natural features of the land. By offering cheaper and speedier transit, the railways made travelling accessible for an increasingly wide audience. Moreover, railway routing favoured some regions which had concentration of places of religious or historical significance. As noted in the previous chapter, it also transformed attitudes towards travel. But railways were necessary though but sufficient for the interpretation of the experiences engendered. Travelling and seeing added new dimensions, and complemented textual knowledge and received wisdom. It either validated or rejected existing ideas. But, not surprisingly, most authors compared their experiences about places especially pilgrim centres with their pre-existing ideas. For instance, the veneration expressed while visiting Benaras or Ayodhya was certainly a product of the authors' prior knowledge of the significance of these cities in the Hindu cosmos. Similarly, a visit to Chittor or Indraprastha enhanced the experience of historical knowledge already available to the visitors. Moreover, visits to such sites and their historical role were now interpreted to suit the newly-invented attitudes towards travel, especially *desh bhraman*. In other words, travels did not remain neutral in its impact. Easier and faster travel showed the unity as well as the diversity of the landscape through actual experience. But as is evident, these experiences were mediated by longer cultural traditions and assumptions that had little to do with railways. The railways therefore contributed in the creation of 'national' space by enhancing the experience of spaces. But the conceptualisations of territory were not as homogenous as has been argued.

## II

The India which the authors of the travelogues imagined and exhorted others to see has been hitherto argued to be a product of the colonial spatial re-structuring. This re-structuring is claimed to have led to a homogenisation, which deprived individual localities of their distinctive meanings, both in economic as well political and cultural terms, and transformed them into a systematised economic grid.<sup>575</sup> While not denying the re-structuring of territory, this section aims to review the claim that this process brought an end to differentiation, and created a homogenous ‘national’ space. It will also assess the primacy of railway in the process, because railway connection has been argued to have shaped the fortunes and status of places on the network.<sup>576</sup> This belief is part of an older, nineteenth century idea which credited technology in general and railways in particular, with the ability to induce material prosperity. Not surprisingly, this idea also influenced the authors of the travelogues, and they often expressed their faith in the ‘Railway Age’ bringing economic growth and progress. Writing in 1841, Pandit Ratneshwar thought railways would prove beneficial for India.<sup>577</sup> More than a decade later similar optimism was expressed by Akshay Kumar Dutt and Kalidas Moitra, both of whom claimed railways would bring material prosperity as it had done in Europe.<sup>578</sup> Moitra even argued that with the commencement of operations of the EIR line, the adjacent areas had already received the ‘railway advantage’ and it was only a matter of time when other areas too would enjoy the same. Another author claimed the material improvement of Howrah dated from the opening of the railways.<sup>579</sup> Later writers too, expressed similar belief. These texts make it plain that a hierarchy of places existed, in which proximity to railways was significant.

Railways therefore played a crucial role in the imagination of this hierarchy. But how far this hierarchy was railway-induced can be questioned. As the previous chapter argued, there were several hierarchies: (i) railway inspired, (ii) historical or cultural – which railways reflected or enhanced, but did not create, and (iii) hierarchies based on size and function – administrative, military, and economic and so on, that railways affected, but again more or less incidentally. This thesis has not tried to assess the economic impact of railways, but this narrow point – the effect of railways on the character and relative importance of place - the

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<sup>575</sup> Sen, ‘Empire’, Bury, ‘Novel’.

<sup>576</sup> A. Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society and the Colonial State in Bihar* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>577</sup> Pandit Ratneshwar, *Patramalika* (Agra, 1841).

<sup>578</sup> Dutt, ‘Bashpiya’, Moitra, ‘East’.

<sup>579</sup> C.N. Banerjei, ‘An account of Howrah: past and present’, (Calcutta, 1872) in ‘Tracts’ Volume 323, OIOC.

question can be discussed only by a comparison of the economic fortunes of regions with and without railway connection. For this purpose I have chosen two sets of places: Mirzapur-Kanpur; and Patna-Champaran. The choice is based on the fact that the first set received railways at the same time; while in the second set Champaran was linked to the railway roughly after half a century after Patna.

### **Mirzapur-Kanpur**

Both Mirzapur and Kanpur received railway connection in 1864. They lay on the main line of the EIRC network connecting Calcutta to Delhi. Geographically they were close – a distance of 155 miles separated them, and both were known for their strategic and commercial importance.<sup>580</sup> Given this, it was expected that both places would prosper with the coming of the railways and every document related to the railway promotion advertised the future prospects of these places in glowing terms.<sup>581</sup> Yet as the railways became operational, the opinions expressed were quite different, and comments such as ‘Cawnpore has risen on the ruins of Mirzapore’ were not infrequent.<sup>582</sup> Interestingly, the railway connection was held responsible for this reversal of fortunes. A situation such as this questions the role of railway alone in inducing and sustaining a differentiation of territories. The explanation might lie in the difference between long and short term changes.

Mirzapur’s location on the Gangetic highway of commerce gave it an advantage whereby it came to dominate the trade flow between Bengal and Bihar on one hand and western India on the other after the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>583</sup> It came to be noted for its flourishing through-trade especially in cotton, opium, and indigo followed by grain and oilseed. The railway routing however had some unintended consequences for Mirzapur. Located on the initial Calcutta-Delhi line of the EIRC, it was an early recipient of steam locomotion. But Mirzapur was also located at the Ganges end of an old road running north-south between the Deccan and the Gangetic valley. It was thus adversely affected by the

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<sup>580</sup> Mirzapur had long history of being a prosperous entrepot town and was also a cantonment of the East India Company army in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century; Kanpur too was known for its trade and by the mid-nineteenth century was the biggest cantonment in north India. These factors were instrumental in bringing these areas within the railway network in the first place. See, Lord Dalhousie’s minute on the ‘Railway Development in India’, April 1853; in ‘Correspondence regarding railway communication in India’, Mf reel no. 60, National Archive of India.

<sup>581</sup> R.M. Stephenson, ‘Report upon the practicability and advantages of the introduction of railways into British India with the official correspondence with the Bengal Government and full statistical data respecting the existing trade upon the line connecting Calcutta with Mirzapore, Benaras, Allahabad and the North-West frontier’, 1844, London, L/PWD/2/43, OIOC.

<sup>582</sup> W.H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian official* (London, 1893).

<sup>583</sup> Bishop Heber, *Narrative of a journey through the upper provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825*; London, OIOC.

routing of the GIPR and the EIRC connection at Allahabad which was completed in 1867 and decisively altered the patterns of trade of the eastern districts. Dealers could now collect commodities in bulk in the western cities and send them by rail to Allahabad. All contemporary accounts point to this as leading to Mirzapur's rapid decline. In an influential study, C.A. Bayly has argued that a notable feature of the transformation of mid-nineteenth century north India due to the railways and other political changes was a decline of old entrepot towns.<sup>584</sup> Among these, Bayly notes that Farrukhabad, Kalpi and Lucknow all lost out to some extent; but Mirzapur suffered the worst. Within a few years, he claimed, the 'Manchester of India' had been reduced to little more than a district town. Moreover, Mirzapur lost its significance as a great exchange mart between Calcutta and the interior. Its own trade was diverted away to cheaper channels. The famous merchant houses (European and Indian) either collapsed or followed trade to new centres. The branch of the Bank of Bengal was closed and 'the city fell almost to the ordinary somnolent level of other small district capitals.'<sup>585</sup>

While claiming the decline of Mirzapur, Bayly also notes that in many cases the change involved no absolute impoverishment. This hint is my entry point to investigate long and short term changes. Mirzapur's role as a centre of through-trade especially in cotton, opium and indigo has already been noted. It received its cotton from several areas in central India but mainly from Narsimhapur, Hoshangabad, Jabalpur and Damoh. Between 1818 and 1834 cotton exports from these regions increased, particularly from 1825 when the Bombay firm of Pestonji first exported cotton from the region down the river Narmada through Burhanpur.<sup>586</sup> This re-routing of central Indian cotton towards Bombay reduced the flow of trade towards Mirzapur and to parts of northern and eastern India. Further, a new cotton route was opened from central India to Bombay in the 1840s. It pre-dated the introduction of the railways by approximately two decades. The development of this road communication for central India, Berar and Bundelkhand re-directed a substantial portion of the cotton trade towards Bombay, which was now closer and easier to access.<sup>587</sup> Contemporary accounts noticed this change in the direction of traffic and speculated on its impact on the older land

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<sup>584</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, townsmen and bazaars: north Indian society in the age of British expansion, 1770-1870* (New Delhi, 2003).

<sup>585</sup> Bayly, 'Rulers'.

<sup>586</sup> D.E.U. Baker, *Colonialism in an Indian hinterland: the central province, 1820-1920* (Delhi, 1993).

<sup>587</sup> J. Chapman, 'The cotton and commerce of India considered in relation to the interest of Great Britain with remarks on railway communication in Bombay Presidency' (London, 1851) OIOC.

route to Mirzapur and thence down river towards Calcutta.<sup>588</sup> Already then, one of the most important articles of commerce which passed through Mirzapur was being re-routed, a change that would affect (as Bayly notes) associated activities such as banking and insurance.

The case of opium was slightly different. The increasing demand for Malwa opium in the international markets as opposed to the produce of Bengal, Bihar and Upper India led to a re-orientation of trade simply because it was easy to supply Malwa opium from Bombay. This reduced a significant portion of Mirzapur's opium trade. Moreover, the territorial restructuring of the north-western provinces after 1857 shifted the sites of opium cultivation and this further reduced the importance of the town as a centre of opium trade.<sup>589</sup> Here too, as in the case of cotton trade, the loss of markets and changes in trade and traffic routes were occurring before the introduction of the railways in the region. Emphasis on Mirzapur's status as a great centre of through-trade also misses out the fact that the rise in the scale of the through trade of Mirzapur was itself a product of the East India Company's agricultural policies which encouraged production and marketing of cash crops as cotton, opium or indigo; and therefore quite recent in origin. Before its rise as an entrepot, Mirzapur was a centre of manufacturing or production for shellac, lac-dye, hardware, and carpets.<sup>590</sup> Bayly mentions carpet weaving, production of brass vessels, and calico prints as trades which managed to adapt successfully to the railway and saved the town from an even more drastic decline. He regards these as examples of successful adaptation; but it can be argued that these were also evidence of continuity, activities that remained resilient during Mirzapur's rise and also when the trade pattern changed. Though neither Mirzapur's carpets nor its brass ware were known for their finesse or craftsmanship, production did not decline after the railway arrived. On the contrary, these industries acquired European capital and 98 per cent of their output was exported to Europe. Another important product of Mirzapur was shellac. Its continued production in Mirzapur might have gone unnoticed perhaps because it was entirely exported to Europe, there being little or no internal traffic in it.

Even as an entrepot Mirzapur continued to play a significant role for stone, grain and firewood. None of these articles was rail borne. Stone and grain were moved by river, and firewood was carried on pack bullocks or carts directed towards the road that led up to the native states of Rewah and Sarguja. This trade was 'invisible' because the government had abolished road, river and canal registration posts from the start of the year 1878-79 claiming:

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<sup>588</sup> F. Parks, *Wanderings of a pilgrim in search of picturesque*, London, 1824 OIOC.

<sup>589</sup> Report on the administration of the North-Western provinces and Oudh, April 1882-November 1887; 1887, Allahabad, OIOC.

<sup>590</sup> T. Roy, *Traditional industry in the economy of colonial India* (Cambridge, 1999).



‘the record of trade crossing inter-provincial boundaries served no useful purpose’.<sup>591</sup> That Mirzapur's river borne trade was not insignificant in the railway era can be substantiated by the increase in daily wage rate of boatmen, noted as a 'large and important class' who until 1880, had received only 3 to 4 annas a day, but were paid 7 annas in 1890 and by 1911, 8 annas a day.<sup>592</sup> Together these data present a more complex picture than a simple cause and effect between railways and Mirzapur's loss of status in the mid-nineteenth century. Several forces were at work, including changes brought by the railways. The factors interacted and it seems that it was their effects that limited Mirzapur's decline.

The evolution of Kanpur in the course of nineteenth century from a garrison town to the most important industrial city of India after Calcutta and Bombay has been a subject of scholarly interest. Railways have been noted as having played a central role in this transformation. The city received railway connection in phases. By 1864 it had a direct link with Calcutta as part of the EIR line; by 1867 it had become a part of the Oudh and Rohilkhand railway network; and by the turn of the century it was a prominent 'junction' of intersecting railway networks.<sup>593</sup> The initial decision to include Kanpur in the rail link between Calcutta and Delhi was solely on the basis of its status as a cantonment.<sup>594</sup> But while surveying for prospective routes, the consulting engineer Captain Simms argued that the city had seen ‘tremendous development’ in growth of trade and should be considered worthy of a railway connection in this respect as well.<sup>595</sup> His views were supported by Robert Montgomery, the district collector of Kanpur who noted: 'there is no place in the upper provinces so well supplied as Cawnpore.'<sup>596</sup> Kanpur's transformation can be argued to have begun in 1773 when it was chosen to station Company troops as a part of the treaty of Faizabad. In 1801 it was formally integrated in the Company territory and this brought traders, merchants, and civil servants to Kanpur. The Europeans stimulated the market and raised prices. Very soon Calcutta traders were keen to exploit the opportunities provided by this new market and either sent goods or came in person to set up in trade.

Thus began the trend of attracting capital to Kanpur and its surrounding zone which was to continue well into the twentieth century. Kanpur's status as the most important

<sup>591</sup> Note on the trade of the north-western provinces during the year 1878-1879, 1879, Allahabad, V/24/4156, OIOC.

<sup>592</sup> Mirzapur: a gazetteer, being volume XXVII of the District Gazetteers of the United Province of Agra and Awadh, 1911, Allahabad, OIOC.

<sup>593</sup> Railway letters and enclosures from Bengal and India, L/PWD/3/40, OIOC.

<sup>594</sup> Dalhousie, 'Minute'.

<sup>595</sup> Simms, 'Report'.

<sup>596</sup> R, Montgomery, 'Statistical report of district of Cawnpore', 1849, Calcutta, OIOC.

cantonment in north India attracted significant capital, both European and indigenous, to encourage agricultural production. The construction of the Grand Trunk road (completed 1838) and subsequently of the Ganges canal (completed 1854) and the metalled road to Lucknow added to the incentive already afforded by the presence of the large military arsenal. Indigo and later opium were introduced as cash crops in the region. Moreover, the military force stationed at Kanpur was a source of a huge demand for leather products obtained solely from the local bazaars. By the late eighteenth century a large 'native' industry had sprung up specialising in the production of boots, harness and accoutrements. A slow transition began in the 1830s with the first exports of Indian hides to Europe. In the aftermath of 1857-58 there was a further stimulus to the leather industry. The authorities were anxious to avoid costly imports and the wasteful system of obtaining stores from England; this gave an encouragement to manufacturing industry in Kanpur. An import substitution scheme was implemented by a young artillery officer, J. Stewart, and within ten years the Government Harness and Saddlery factory was established.

The large military presence also provided an incentive for cotton mills - an industry with which Kanpur came to be closely associated. The first great cotton mill - the Elgin Cotton Spinning and Weaving Company - was founded in 1862. The first cotton mills coincided with the arrival of railways in Kanpur, but they were not the main reason for them. A group of influential Indian bankers had formed the Cawnpore Cotton Committee in 1860 which in response to the rise in cotton prices due to American Civil War was contemplating a scheme to start a cotton mill in Kanpur rather than sending the cotton to Calcutta. The plans were approved by the government and they inaugurated a new era in Kanpur. It is important to underline that in most cases the industrial manufacturing and production started before the railway reached Kanpur. Instead of the railway, a strong case can be made that a particular tax - an octroi - may have led to the industrial development of Kanpur. It was introduced in 1865 in all major cities of the north-western provinces except Kanpur. The reason for exclusion of Kanpur was its status as a 'mart of through trade of no great importance'.<sup>597</sup> Within a gap of ten years, however, it was admitted that the decision had had a significant influence on Kanpur's growth. Being a free mart surrounded by towns subjected to a 'vexatious tax' had contributed to its growth. Its trade statistics reveal that its traffic was nearly as large as that of four largest cities of the provinces, Delhi, Agra, Chandausi and

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<sup>597</sup> E.C. Buck, Notes on trade of North-Western Provinces, 1877-78, Allahabad, OIOC.

Faizabad put together.<sup>598</sup> The tax was introduced in 1865, a year after railway reached Kanpur; yet it was declared as a matter of little consequence. This was evidently an error, but one that the railway alone was not expected to change. When it comes to growth, tax and other factors remain important. The case of Mirzapur and Kanpur contest the assumption that the railway network alone was responsible for differentiation of territories and argues for wider and more complex processes.

### **Patna- Champaran:**

Broadly speaking, the two regions of Patna and Champaran offered similar commercial and strategic advantages to the railway promoters of the mid-nineteenth century. Patna enjoyed an enviable position on the Ganges controlling and redirecting the riverine and the overland commerce between Bengal and Upper India; Champaran with its easy access to the river Gandak and proximity to the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal formed a link between the trade of lower Bengal, north Bihar, parts of north-west provinces, and beyond. Further, the introduction of cash crops like opium, sugar and indigo from the early nineteenth century onwards introduced a significant amount of European capital to both these areas. Yet Patna received the railways in the very first phase of the railway connection joining Calcutta and Delhi. And Champaran received the railways in phases, starting from the late nineteenth century. It was only by 1905 that the railways finally reached northernmost Bihar. Did this uneven access to the railway connection have differential impact on Patna and Champaran?

Analysing the relation between markets, society and the colonial state in Bihar Anand Yang has argued that with the development of the railways, Bihar was 'bypassed' and the Gangetic Bihar entered into a phase of stagnation.<sup>599</sup> Since he denies the usual benevolent role ascribed to the railway connection, this argument can offer a useful entry point to assess the changes brought by the railways in the region. Patna's locational advantage, especially its position on the great Gangetic artery connecting northern India to Bengal, made it ideal as an entrepot city. Land routes connected Patna both with the cities of the north and with the important centres in Bengal.<sup>600</sup> The city also served as an outlet for several commodities produced in its hinterland namely, sugar, opium, silk, cotton, and textiles. These commodities were exported to the cities and the towns of northern India, Bengal, and outside India. By 1620, Patna was being described as the 'cheapest mart towne of all Bengala.'<sup>601</sup> Therefore it

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<sup>598</sup> Idem.

<sup>599</sup> Yang, 'Bazaar'.

<sup>600</sup> K. Chatterjee, *Merchants, politics and society in early modern India, Bihar: 1733-1820* (New York, 1996)

<sup>601</sup> W. Foster, *The English factories in India* (Oxford, 1911).

was Patna's primacy as a centre of trade, and its banking and political importance which influenced the railway promoters to include it on the proposed railway network between Calcutta and Delhi.

For Yang, however, it is this railway connection which led to 'bypassing' of the Gangetic Bihar. In the late nineteenth century, he argues, Patna's "commanding role" as the regional entrepot declined. It lost the enormous trading advantage of a strategic location on the major river highways. Rail lines within the region ended its role as a forwarding station for the neighbouring districts. With the opening up of the Ajmer- Bombay line, goods from the north western provinces were now being sent directly to Bombay, instead of via Patna, and this reduced its role as a 'great central godown.'<sup>602</sup> But how far railways were responsible for this stagnation needs to be investigated further. Patna received railway in the first phase of the EIR network reaching Delhi. To capitalize on the proximity of the Ganges, the initial alignment of the lines followed the course of the river, roughly following the line of the old Mughal trunk route.<sup>603</sup> By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a second railway across south Bihar was developed. Also, a grand chord line between Mughalsarai and Calcutta was opened.<sup>604</sup> Thus the railway lines were intended to tie together the important towns of south Bihar and providing ready access to north Bihar as well.

As hinted earlier, Patna's position in the regional economy was mainly as a manufacturing centre and a nodal point of through-trade. Patna had the advantage of producing and manufacturing a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural products and was noted for high-quality agrarian produce, most notably rice, oil seeds, pulses and fresh vegetables. All these were exported to Bengal and especially to Calcutta. Besides, Patna produced and processed opium and transported it to Calcutta. Among the non-agrarian commodities it was known for the manufacture of saltpetre, cotton and silk textiles, carpets, brocades, lac ornaments, hides, and craft objects in wood and glass. But it was the through-trade which lent a distinct character to the city of Patna. The Ganges and the Son were the main arteries of communication for transporting merchandise and passenger traffic to Bengal on one hand and to the north-west provinces on the other. The Gandak and the Gogra aided the movement of traffic from northern parts of Bihar towards Patna. Road transportation, being costly and time-consuming, was not as significant as the riverine routes. The locational advantage of the city ensured its position as the pre-eminent commercial centre of the region.

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<sup>602</sup> Yang, 'Bazaar'.

<sup>603</sup> Fazl, 'A'in'.

<sup>604</sup> W.W. Hunter, 'A statistical account of Bengal', Volume XI, Districts of Patna and Saran; 1877; London, OIOC.

According to Yang, Patna lost *this* edge with the coming of the railways. The trade reports and other statistical sources, however, reveal a more complex picture. Throughout the late nineteenth century the figures show consistency in the patterns of export and import.<sup>605</sup> W.W. Hunter, an official and a contemporary observer, noted the vigorous trade of region. His figures on the aggregate of merchandise (by weight) show the proportion of entire trade of Patna city carried by several routes for the single year of 1875 is worth quoting:

1875	Rail	River	Road
<b>Import</b> (weight in maunds)	444,422 (14%)	2,078,090 (66%)	644,344 (20%)
<b>Export</b> (weight in maunds)	1,105,659 (73%)	395,315 (26%)	24,853 (1%).

The numbers are self-evident. They reveal an important pattern which was to influence the trade of the city. The import trade continued to rely heavily on the riverine network while the railways were successful in attracting a bulk of the export trade. Well into the twentieth century the trade reports and their accompanying statistics continued to emphasise that Patna's position in eastern India was rivalled only by Calcutta.

There is a further complexity in this picture of Patna's continuing commercial importance. From the late nineteenth century, Patna's imports exceeded exports. This, seen with the relevant sections in the census reports, complicates the picture. Yang's account fails to separate two aspects of Patna, *one* as a centre of through-trade for the region of Bihar and beyond; and *two*, as a manufacturing and commodity-producing region. Railways had differential impact on these two aspects. It seems that instead of 'bypassing' Bihar, the railway network created a distinct circuit of production, manufacturing and exchange. This network complemented the earlier ones which were exclusively directed towards the cities like Patna with access to riverine communication. As the speed, reliability and cheaper freight rates offered by railways slowly led to the decline of the water transportation in Gangetic Bihar, this change was reflected in the trade and the traffic statistics, giving an impression of decline or loss of status. The volume of trade came to be re-distributed along various rail heads and roads across Bihar and beyond, and the earlier concentration on Patna was lost. However, rather than automatically inaugurating phase of decline, the railway network produced a web of inter-linked sites of commerce and exchange re-aligned primarily towards Calcutta to fulfil the needs of the colonial economy. Contrary to the claims of most

<sup>605</sup> Annual Statistical Reporter, Volumes consulted: 1870-1890, OIOC.

accounts the railways certainly did not add to Patna's commercial prosperity to any great extent; but neither did they precipitate its overall decline. The railway connection was an important factor in Patna's loss of trade and the decline of the river export trade. But riverine imports remained important well after the advent of the railways and resistant to them, while Patna also continued to be a major centre of administration, military and education, and to play an important role in the region.

Champanan, a district in north Bihar, also offered strategic and commercial prospects to the railway promoters. The district occupies the northwest corner of Bihar and shares boundaries with Nepal, and Muzaffarpur district in Bihar. The region is also well served by rivers. The Gandak and the Baghmata fulfil a dual purpose of navigation and natural boundaries; the Burhi Gandak is useful just for navigational purposes. All three of the rivers being navigable throughout the year facilitated commerce. Under colonial rule, one of the distinct features of much of north Bihar was the presence of powerful landlords. These local rulers enjoyed much independence in their administrative and economic activities. In Champanan much of the land belonged to one of the estates of the region: the Bettiah Raj, the Ramnagar Raj, and the Madhuban Raj. This co-existence of great landed estates with the colonial administrative structure complicated the land-holding pattern and the day-to-day administration of the district. The root of the indigo plantation industry in Champanan lay in this peculiar arrangement.

Though the region exported high-value crops like oil seeds, rice and sugar – its commercial importance hinged upon indigo cultivation and processing. Indigo had a long presence in Bihar. But it was after the indigo disturbances and the subsequent collapse of the industry in lower Bengal that indigo became important in Champanan.<sup>606</sup> The industry received a further boost in the region in 1876 when the Bettiah Raj was deeply involved in debt and a sterling loan of nearly 95 lakhs was floated on the security of permanent leases of villages which were granted by the estate to the indigo planters. The result was that although a bare six per cent of the cultivated area was actually sown with indigo, the planters were in the position of landlords over nearly half the district.<sup>607</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century, the region became the premier site of indigo plantations and attracted enormous European capital. In this interplay between the landlords, private European planters and the colonial

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<sup>606</sup> B. Kling, *Blue Mutiny: the indigo disturbances in Bengal, 1859-1862* (Philadelphia, 1966).

<sup>607</sup> Report of the administration of the Bengal Presidency for the year 1876-1877, V/10/48, OIOC.

state, it was notorious that the peasants of Champaran suffered.<sup>608</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that indigo determined the political, material, and social structure of Champaran.

Railway expansion in north Bihar began in the wake of the famine of 1873-74. Very soon a number of proposals for constructing railway lines across north Bihar were proposed primarily because: 'one lesson learnt from the famine of 1873-74 was the importance of railway communication on the north of the Ganges.'<sup>609</sup> But it seems that, beyond a point, railway expansion in north Bihar was not on the immediate agenda of the government. One reason for this was the belief that north Bihar would prove unremunerative and would not offer adequate compensation for the capital expended. There was an extensive network of well-kept road and the rivers offering cheap and efficient connection with lower Bengal. A sizeable amount of north Bihar produce was brought downstream by the Gandak to Patna and was re-distributed. The same system of communication sustained the region's import trade consisting mainly of cloth and salt.

Another factor was that the local European society of planters was not too keen on the railway either. Their reluctance perhaps holds the key to the apparent paradox of late railway arrival and the commercial development of Champaran. At one level transportation of indigo by roads and the rivers was simply a matter of making more profit. The indigo planters were constantly looking for means of maximising their profits with minimum capital outlay. Even in the 1880s the cost of carriage by *gadi* varied from half to three-quarters of a pie per maund/mile and the freight by boat down the Gandak was less than one third of a pie per maund/mile. In comparison the fixed railway freight rates appeared high. There is evidence to believe the Tirhut State Railways seriously contemplated offering competitive prices; but it was difficult to lower railway freight rates beyond a point. Further, the railway lines in north Bihar were metre gauge. Since there was no direct line to Calcutta, transporting goods destined for that city already involved the extra cost and the time loss of re-handling and re-loading. For the planters therefore, the maximum commercial advantage lay in continuing to use roads and rivers as the main channels for the transit of processed indigo.

Apart from cost effectiveness, the 'railway age', in Champaran was delayed by a set of political calculations derived from the material and social structure of Champaran. Jacques Pouchepadass has shown that how the indigo industry was foisted on a complex peasant society; and how from the mid-nineteenth century with the rise of commercial agriculture in

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<sup>608</sup> J. Pouchepadass, *Land, power and market: a Bihar district under colonial rule, 1860-1947* (London, 2000).

<sup>609</sup> Sir R. Temple, Minute on famine in Bengal, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1874, OIOC.

the region, two systems inevitably clashed.<sup>610</sup> The dominant method of indigo cultivation was the *assamiwar* system. This meant the peasant cultivators were forced to cultivate indigo, often on their best lands. Since most of the villages of the district were leased out (*thika*) to the indigo planters by the big landlords of the region, the cultivators had no other option but to succumb to this pressure. But the region of north Bihar had traditionally been a food-grain exporting region. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards food-grain prices especially rice were steadily rising. Indigo cultivation clashed with the main rice growing seasons which meant that by cultivating indigo the peasant cultivator was compelled to forsake the possibilities of higher returns and better material prospects. With the indigo and oil seeds, the other major export crop of the region, both being out of the reach of ordinary peasant cultivators, the food-grain trade was also the only one in which they could hope to participate and become part time traders. The planters and the managers of the indigo plantations were only too aware of this resentment against indigo's exclusiveness. Under such circumstances it was rather in the favour of the planters not to clamour for the extension of railways in the region. The food-grain trade had the least structured marketing system in the region. If the railway was to offer a ready outlet for food grains, then it would be very difficult for the planters to convince the cultivators to grow indigo willingly.

In the case of Champaran, the decision on the part of the government to delay the railway extension was influenced both by pecuniary motives and in order to provide an additional source of support to the industry. By the early twentieth century the indigo plantation industry had already suffered a severe blow from the discovery of German synthetic dye. In spite of heavy losses it continued to exist, mainly because of the support extended by the colonial state and the local landlords. The First World War resuscitated the industry for a while but clearly it was past its prime. Interestingly, as the railway lines brought Champaran and its peasants within the expanding trading network of the twentieth century, in 1917 they also brought Mohandas Gandhi to the Motihari railway station.

From the illustrative examples of the two sets of regions it seems the role of the railway in differentiating territory was more complex and even ambivalent than usually argued, even in respect to railway induced hierarchies. Conversely, it was possibly more important than thought for enhancing the significance of places like Benaras or Allahabad. These conclusions also question the creation of a homogenised economic space through which commodities flowed without any hindrance, reflecting the success of the colonial state

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<sup>610</sup> J. Pouchepadass, *Champaran and Gandhi: planters, peasants and Gandhian politics* (New Delhi, 1999).



in introducing modernity in India. It is evident that the creation of a homogenised ‘national’ space was incomplete; and that if anything, railways played a limited, almost incidental role in this process. They probably added new layers to the existing functions associated with specific places, without drastically altering their nature. The idea of *desh* was created in the mind, only partly by railway journeys. By exaggerating the change from pre-colonial travel, it may seem that the railways produced ideas related to national identity and territory; however, these ideas were identifying with something ancient and Hindu. The image of change can be dismissed as a colonial stereotype reflected in the writings of colonial elite; the interesting point, if this is true, why this contrast was being made by Indians. Presumably they believed it and it fitted with a broader narrative.

As the first section showed, land was imagined in the mid-nineteenth century India in ways that were not just a reflection of recent political interventions. Moreover, the use of multiple conceptualisations, with apparent disregard of the cartographic ideal of a unified India, questions the homogenisation powers attributed to the colonial spatial restructuring as well as the geographical knowledge imparted through schools and colleges. It is instructive that Surendranath Ray chose to quote R.C Dutt’s claim of a visit to north India as a lesson in history which was absent from the curricula. This rather questions the assumption of a causal link between ‘colonial knowledge’ and a specific view of India’s past. Modern maps and rapid travel added new elements to an existing corpus of conceptualisations of territory in India, suggestive of a range of idea available to these authors which they evidently used to interpret their specific experiences. The outcome may be argued to have been a deliberate attempt to overstep colonial knowledge and to question its legitimacy. Instead of conformity, notions of negation and challenge may be useful to understand the conceptualisations of territory in colonial India.

Most significant, as noted already, the imaginations of India and its constituent parts were exclusive, both geographically and historically. Pushed to a logical conclusion this *desh* was a Hindu nation. One may only speculate how far these travels and texts added to the existing pool of sectarian ideas in late nineteenth century India. It is not without significance that the authors repeatedly underlined their travels to Rajputana or parts of Maharashtra and exhorted their readers to do same, presumably to have a vicarious experience of a ‘glorious Hindu past’. Similarly, the descriptive notes about places like Lucknow, Delhi or Agra leave no doubt about the attitude towards Muslims. It can be argued that the intensity of this prescription was especially relevant in north India, a region dotted with vast evidence of Muslim achievements, where it was more difficult to appreciate a ‘great Hindu past’. Rather

than recommending a visit to north India was not recommended for a glimpse into India's past, the manager of the Great Bengal Circus offered an alternate list of 'places of interest', arguably to bypass 'Muslim achievements'. Similarly, a wider pool of ideas in late nineteenth century India which sought to create a specific and exclusive view of India's past. For instance, the use of Sanskritised nomenclature for places by Bengali authors was influenced by the on-going linguistic debate over the status of the Bengali language in regard to Sanskrit.<sup>611</sup> This in turn contributed to notions of identity but here it is sufficient to argue that it enabled these authors to make an explicit connection with a particular past, by linking notions of Bengali (Hindu) identity with Aryan as well as Maratha and Rajput histories. Moreover, as said, imagining *desh* as *Aryavarta* notionally excluded low castes as well as Muslims. The implications of this for India have yet to be investigated.

What was the role of the railways in creating such ideas and sustaining differentiation? It was not the intention of this chapter to explore the impact of railway on the economy of colonial India. Nevertheless, it has suggested some preliminary ideas. What is evident from the second section is that the railway's ability to deliver material changes was more important in imagination than reality. Interestingly, in both imagining and differentiating territory one can identify an element of railway-induced exaggeration, though in different directions. Railways, it can be argued, created opposite conclusions, and in both cases railways were claimed to be instrumental in initiating change. In the first case, the claim was of a new age of travel distinctly different from its earlier counterparts; and in the second, there was another exaggeration, related to the economic impact of the railways and an idea of modernisation. Seen together, they present mirror images conveying two opposite ideas – one with a particular view of the past and the other with a prescription for the future. Here again (as in the previous chapters), it can be argued that space (in this case both natural and social) was shaped by conflicting social interests. The foregoing discussion also question the disparity hypothesis as outlined in chapter one. Here, greater integration (spatial) paradoxically reinforced difference. Further, as the persistence of pre-railway hierarchy of places suggest, the role of railway in this integration was in some senses incidental rather than instrumental. The local conditions were affected by railways but not necessarily re-created by them. Also, there was a substantial overlap of older and newer forms. Perhaps much of this was related to a fetishization of technology which had been influential ever since the nineteenth century, celebrating its ability to propel social changes. How far it was

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<sup>611</sup> S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas* (Calcutta, 1978).

capable of inducing such changes has been examined in this chapter. The evidence points towards a more modest role for the railways than hitherto argued. In the process, the chapter has also argued for a fragmentary and differentiated notion of space in colonial India and has questioned the completeness of the creation of a homogenised 'national' territory. The next chapter will focus on railway travel and the notions of identity and community.

## Chapter Seven

### *Railway Journeys: notions of identity and community*

Railway travelling in India became immediately popular. Crowded railway carriages, busy railway stations and official statistics – all attest to the popularity of the railways. But the demands of this new form of transport entailed a degree of physical proximity between travellers which was unprecedented in its intensity. Never before the railways had fifty people travelled cheek-by-jowl for several hours in small, locked carriages. Railway journeys brought more people together at the same time and in the same space with increased frequency. This interaction and contact afforded possibilities of experiencing and expressing notions of identity. Moreover, the railway was transporting more people to regions outside their own than ever before with relative ease and speed. This too sharpened the experiences and expressions of identity and community. The railway operations therefore played a dual role in this process of increased contact between people – *one*, it provided the sites (the stations, the waiting rooms, the carriages) at which such contacts were made; and *two*, it physically transported people to different places and took them away from the familiar. Hitherto little attempt has been made to assess the role of the railway in shaping notions of identity in colonial India.<sup>612</sup> This chapter aims to explore whether and how the railway contributed to notions of identity and community mainly by a critical analysis of the travelogues written by Indian railway travellers. Did railway journeys add any new element in knowing people? And how did the journeys influence existing ideas of identity? The chapter will also underline the impact and implications for India of these notions identity. It is divided into three sections: the first one focuses on the impact of railway on the experiences of identity and community; and the second and third sections examine how these experiences were understood or interpreted in contexts other than the railway.

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<sup>612</sup>Chatterjee, 'Discovering'.

## I

To say that railway travel brought people together in new ways is not to suggest that pre-railway travelling did not entail any similar experiences. But in the case of railway travel the experience was unique and intense mainly because of the demands of this new transport system. The practices of buying tickets, the pushing and shoving at the ticket booking counters, the long hours of waiting at the platforms or in the waiting rooms, and last but not least the forced confinement of several hours in the carriages, all added to the experience of meeting people and also set in motion a process of comparison and contrast. This process is most evident in the comparative ethnographic discussion in the travelogues. Before attempting any assessment of these discussions, few caveats need to be noted. *One*, the observations and comments expressed, though personal, were not private and thus were intended for circulation and dissemination. *Two*, the ethnographic descriptions were culled from diverse sources which included colonial ethnographic discourse, pre-colonial accounts including mythological descriptions, and personal experiences. And *three*, the authors of the travelogues invariably travelled in upper class carriages and therefore were most likely to travel with European and Eurasian passengers. Though these moments had the potential to add to notions of identity, their experiences or conditions of travel differed from most Indians who travelled in the lower class carriages.

According to Kumkum Chatterjee these ethnographic descriptions are indicative of the necessity felt by the Bengali nationalist bourgeoisie to wrest from the colonial state and its ideologues the right to describe India on their own terms.<sup>613</sup> She describes it as a ‘nationalist ethnography’ which attempted to present orderly and systematic descriptions of Indian people to an Indian audience. For Chatterjee, the proof of this ethnography being ‘nationalistic’ is that unlike its colonial counterpart the starting point of the endeavour lay in self-definition. Though she admits to the frequent use of the colonial ethnographic discourse, she explains this as an ‘inability’ of this group to be completely free of the influence of the British colonial presence. In my view, too much should not be read into this use of official sources. On one hand the authors of these texts lacked the advantage of hindsight and saw these publications simply as ready-to-use sources of information. On the other hand, the official sources were drawn from an eclectic range of materials which included Indian pre-colonial texts as much as quasi-scientific theories and notions imported from Europe. What needs to be underlined is not the use of stereotypes per se; but their skilful and selective

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<sup>613</sup> Idem.

adaptation to create radically distinct definitions of 'self' and 'other'. Most importantly, these definitions were deployed to reach conclusions of significant political and social import which, if examined, not only add crucial dimensions to the expressions of notions of community and identity, but also question whether or not they were 'nationalistic'.

The following paragraphs will bring together experiences of Indian railway travellers. These disparate events are expected to bring out the specific issues around which expressions of identity were constructed and can offer a way to analyse wider issues which were triggered partly as a result of these experiences. As noted earlier, experiencing close physical proximity was one of the most striking experiences of railway journeys. Not surprisingly therefore, the authors of the travelogues revealed their fellow passengers' identity to initiate the process of comparison. On a trip to Rajmahal, Jagmohan Chakrabarty's co-passengers comprised of 'funny looking' Israelites. His earlier railway travel experiences included sharing carriage with a German doctor on one occasion and on other with a group of British soldiers.<sup>614</sup> Kashinath Mukhopadhyay too, commented on the identity of his six co-travellers which included his friend (a Bengali like him), a Eurasian lady, a young lawyer from the North-Western Provinces, a Marwari businessman, one European, and a Eurasian man.<sup>615</sup> Similarly, Surendranath Ray noted that his companions were two non-Bengali men. Later they were joined by others who 'appeared' to be non-Bengalis except for one whose physical features made it hard for the author to guess his regional affiliation.<sup>616</sup> These attempts at describing fellow passengers are suggestive of a process of instant classification based primarily on physical features. And this classification was further used to draw broader conclusions about the characteristic features of specific communities and their normative behaviour. It often offered a convenient entry point to engage with ideas of 'self' and 'other'. For example, the self-definition in the Bengali travelogues invariably began with an acceptance of the colonial stereotype of Bengalis as effeminate and weak people.<sup>617</sup> In colonial classification Bengalis were a 'non-martial race', who possessed poor physique and showed apathy for any kind of manual labour. Bengalis were also supposed to be of a home-bound nature and not likely to display either physical or moral courage. These features of Bengalis were argued to be a product of Bengal's climatic conditions and were further sustained by food - their habit of consuming excessive rice. The acceptance of these attributes is evident on several occasions.

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<sup>614</sup> Chakrabarty, 'My first'.

<sup>615</sup> Mukhopadhyay, 'Railway'.

<sup>616</sup> Ray, 'Uttar Paschim'.

<sup>617</sup> M. Sinha, *Colonial masculinity: the 'manly' Englishman and the "effeminate Bengali" in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester, 1995).

For instance, Shayamakanta Ganguly explained his struggles to buy a ticket at the crowded ticket window at Katihar junction in terms of his being an ‘effete and weak Bengali’ who had to expend time and energy to make his way to the counter which was blocked by ‘burly north Indians’.<sup>618</sup>

This linking of food, climate and effeminacy was very common. Saratchandra Shastri was appreciative of the ability of the Marathas to climb mountainous terrain without fatigue and attributed this to their food. He noted: ‘these people do not consider traversing such terrain as challenging because unlike *us* they do not survive by eating fine rice. Their appetite is satiated only after eating a substantial amount of *atta* mixed with generous helping of *ghee* along with vegetables.’<sup>619</sup> This strength-inducing food, he argued, enabled them to endure physical labour. Given this, he was not surprised that courageous characters like Shivaji and Peshwa Baji Rao were a product of this culture. Surendranath Ray also thought the choice of food explained Bengalis’ effeminate nature.<sup>620</sup> Passing through the NWP he noted: ‘people of this *desh* do not eat food only to satiate their taste buds. For them any food is delicious which offers physical strength and energy. This is why Hindustanis are physically stronger than *us*.’ Similarly, Prasannamayi Devi argued that Hindustanis prefer health and nutrition over taste.<sup>621</sup> Climatic theories were equally popular. Kedar Nath Das noted that the evenness of the land and its fertility was as much the source of Bengal’s fortune as it was responsible for making Bengalis effeminate, weak and lazy.<sup>622</sup> Lingam Laksmaji Pandit noted Bengal as a ‘quiet and fertile country’ which offered no occasion for the evolution of martial spirit among its inhabitants.<sup>623</sup> He argued that the Bengalis’ preference for fighting with their tongue rather than with a sword was well-known; it was common knowledge that Bengalis would faint at the sight of a drawn sword.

Bengalis, it was argued, lacked certain accomplishments which non-Bengalis possessed. This included, among other things, a ‘spirit of enterprise’. It meant Bengali youths remained satisfied to work as clerks in government or mercantile offices and did not aspire to become independent businessmen or even farmers. This was described as symptomatic of the ‘slave mentality’ of Bengalis. Most authors lamented that, in spite of an early exposure to western education and training, Bengalis had failed to learn what was good for them and their

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<sup>618</sup> Ganguly, ‘Uttar Bharat’.

<sup>619</sup> S. Shastri, *Dakshinapath Bhraman* (Murshidabad, 1898).

<sup>620</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar Paschim’. The author used the term ‘hina-birya’ (Bengali) lit, impotent.

<sup>621</sup> Devi, ‘Aryavarta’

<sup>622</sup> K.N. Das, *Bharatbarsher Pratichi Dig-Vihar* (Murshidabad, 1872).

<sup>623</sup> Pandit, ‘The Aryavarta’.

country. By comparison, people of Bombay, especially Parsis, and even north Indian peasants were argued to be better off. Prasannamayi Devi requested her women readers to ponder as to why they felt so proud of their menfolk while all they did was *chakri*.<sup>624</sup> These deficiencies of Bengali character were identified as a product of wider issues specific to Bengal including the practices of child marriage, caste prejudice, social sanctions against widow-remarriage, and widespread apathy or even resentment over women's education. These were noted to plague Bengali society, lead to weak and effeminate progeny, and eventually hinder the growth and progress of Bengalis. All authors noted the relative lack of caste prejudice and the prevalence of inter-dining in western or central India. Moreover, women of these parts were noted as 'more free' in their manners and movements than their Bengali counterparts.

Not surprisingly, these social ills were traced back to the effects of Muslim rule. Inhabitants of the Indo-Gangetic plain were argued to have been corrupted by long exposure to the ills of Muslim rule, customs and rituals. The acceptance of this stereotype is also evident from repeated emphasis on visiting parts of Rajputana and Maharashtra, the homeland of 'martial races'. These regions were important as sites of Hindu resistance against Muslim aggression, but they had added significance for Bengali readers. All authors remarked on their visits to Chittor by claiming them as an achievement for a weak Bengali.<sup>625</sup> So crucial was the visit, that on rare occasions when some authors failed to see the fort, it elicited a lament.<sup>626</sup> The complexities involved in the internalisation of this colonial ethnographic stereotype have already received scholarly attention and are beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>627</sup> Our concern is with the issues around which notions of 'self' and 'other' were constructed, and with the railway journeys that provided new sites where differences were explored and asserted.

It was not surprising that attempts at self-definition ran parallel to a process of classifying the 'other'. Interestingly, the image of 'other' was created by radical transformation of the meanings associated with ideas of 'self', though in most cases assumptions remained implicit. The physical deficiencies of Bengalis were argued to be compensated for by their superior intellect, western education and 'civility' which set them

<sup>624</sup> Devi, 'Aryavarta'. Also see, S. Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, chakri and bhakti: Ramakrishna and his times', in S. Sarkar, *Writing social history* (New Delhi, 2002).

<sup>625</sup> Baradakanta Sengupta, Navinchandra Sen, Surendranath Ray, Dharanikanta Lahiri-Chaudhuri expressed similar sentiments.

<sup>626</sup> D. Rakshit, *Bharat Pradakshin* (Calcutta, 1903).

<sup>627</sup> A. Nandy, *The Intimate enemy: the loss and recovery of self under colonialism* (Delhi, 2009).



apart from other Indians.<sup>628</sup> In a striking example Durgacharan Ray used the word *asabhya* to describe ‘Biharis’.<sup>629</sup> On three occasions he used the word as a prefix to ‘Biharis’, making it difficult to delineate whether he was referring to their specific behaviour or as a characteristic of the people of Bihar. In the first case, a group of ‘Biharis’ wanted to force their way into a second class carriage and were refused entry since they had third class tickets. In the second, a ticket collector had a difficult time convincing a ‘Bihari’ to deposit his ticket at the termination of the journey. And in the third case, a group of ‘Biharis’ refused to enter an empty third class carriage and insisted on travelling in an already crowded one because they did not want to travel without their companions. For the author, this refusal and the obstinate behaviour displayed the ‘sheep like mentality’ of ‘Biharis’ and betrayed their inability to lead by example. Ironically, this description matched with railway officials’ opinion about similar incidents with the notable exception that in the official estimate all Indians were prone to herd mentality. On a different note, it also underlines the link between railway encounters and the validation of characteristic features or behaviour which were crucial ingredients in the construction of definitions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. The author was not alone in expressing such opinions about non-Bengalis especially about people of Bihar and the north-western provinces. For Kedar Nath Das, though, the natives of Bhagalpur were strong and manly but inferior in intelligence and manners because they were neither as well-educated nor as civilised as Bengalis.<sup>630</sup> Baradakanta Sengupta implied a difference with Bengal by noting the ‘lack of *bhadraloks*’ in Rajmahal, he described the people of the region as ‘grossly uneducated’.<sup>631</sup> Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, a school student, thought the people of Deoghar were not as civilised as people of his *desh* and also cited lack of education as the probable reason.<sup>632</sup> Similar feelings were echoed by Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri. On a trip to Orissa he came into contact with the *telengas* and thought no other race in India was as ‘stupid and ignorant’ as they were.<sup>633</sup>

Plainly, Bengalis might appear to accept the stereotype of weakness, but they also contested any implication of inferiority. In the case of food, too, after the initial acceptance of the Bengali diet’s deleterious influence on physique, they argued that a taste for finer foods reflected higher civilizational attainment. Baradakanta Sengupta informed his Bengali readers

<sup>628</sup> ‘Civility’, in these texts, implied acceptance and use of western manners and customs.

<sup>629</sup> Ray, ‘Debganer’.

<sup>630</sup> Das, ‘Bharatbarsher’.

<sup>631</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat Bhraman’.

<sup>632</sup> Bandyopadhyay, ‘Bhraman’.

<sup>633</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Bhraman Vrittanta’.

of the availability of fresh *Ilish* in Rajmahal, which he argued, would save them from eating local food.<sup>634</sup> Similarly, Surendranath Ray admitted the ‘strength inducing’ qualities of Hindustani food, but also thought it to be ‘coarse and inedible.’<sup>635</sup> He felt that people of northern India had never known the pleasure of eating epicurean delights such as *luchi* and *rosogolla*. More importantly, the weak and effeminate image was contested by arguing that Bengalis were aware of their political rights and did not hesitate to demand equal treatment from Europeans. Travelling around, these authors noted several instances of differential treatment of Indians by Europeans and claimed Bengalis were respected more than other Indian *jatis*. Prasannamayee Devi thought the physical strength of the north Indians was of no great use vis-à-vis Europeans.<sup>636</sup> She noted that Hindustanis lived in mortal fear of Europeans and rarely faced them while Bengalis were better off and Europeans behaved more thoughtfully towards them. For Baradakanta Sengupta, however, it was the political awareness of Bengalis which attracted European ire. He thought the reason for better relations between Europeans and the people of Bombay lay in the submissive attitude of the latter. Though not appreciative, he nonetheless argued: ‘unlike Bengalis these people do not want to be equals and Europeans prefer this behaviour.’<sup>637</sup> This self-image was further bolstered by the *swadeshi* movement at the turn of the century. Shayamakanta Ganguly thought his belongings were searched by the ticket collector at Lucknow station because his identity as a Bengali was enough to rouse fear in the mind of the railway official.<sup>638</sup> In a similar incident Satyendrakumar Basu felt he was interrogated and his luggage rummaged through at the Victoria Terminus just because he was a Bengali.<sup>639</sup>

Evidently, these authors accepted and used colonial stereotypes to define ‘self’ and ‘other’. But the acceptance was partial and was appropriated to serve a bigger point which even contested the colonial claims and built a radically different self-image. A careful reading of this Bengali self-critique reveals a fascinating argument: Bengalis already possessed the advantage of an early access to English education and training. If they could follow independent economic pursuits, then their economic position would be comparable to their socio-political one. Read along with the foregoing discussion about the claim of Bengalis being at par with Europeans or at any rate demanding equality, this is a political prescription.

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<sup>634</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>635</sup> Ray, ‘Uttar Paschim’.

<sup>636</sup> Devi, ‘Aryavarta’.

<sup>637</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat Bhraman’.

<sup>638</sup> Ganguly, ‘Uttar Bharat’.

<sup>639</sup> S. Basu, *Bharat Bhraman* (Calcutta, 1911).

These authors, having travelled and met people, were claiming a pre-eminent political and social role for Bengalis. This claim, however, could only be sustained if Bengali industry, both in terms of capital and labour, could be as successful as other aspects of Bengali life.<sup>640</sup> Bengalis therefore were exhorted to overcome their limitations (which by the way were due to the Muslims) and claim a pre-eminent position based on their accomplishments. Given this, it is not surprising that, in an undisguised attempt to claim pre-eminence, Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri argued other *jatis* of India must admit that Bengalis possessed the greatest talent and intelligence; and that India could never have any reform (political and social) without Bengalis.<sup>641</sup> Or, as Durgacharan Ray suggested, the inability or unwillingness of the ‘Biharis’ to adapt to the practices introduced by a new system of transport was suggestive of a larger issue, that they were incapable of independent decision making and therefore needed to be led towards ‘civility’, presumably by Bengalis.<sup>642</sup>

Ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’ were also formulated around issues of travelling with members of other caste or religious communities. The demands of railway travel, especially physical proximity with the ‘other’, played a crucial role in either creating or adding to the notion of difference. Railways introduced a degree of social levelling. The travelogues merely hint at this possibility without offering any details. This is not surprising since upper class carriages provided sufficient space to maintain distance and did not threaten rules of purity and pollution. In addition, it was rather unlikely for persons of very low castes to travel in upper class carriages. But the reports in the Indian language newspapers suggest the issue of sharing carriages with people regardless of their caste or religious affiliations was contentious. Demanding improvements in existing railway arrangements, a newspaper report wanted the establishment of new class between the second and the third to remove frequent complaints against the practice of the noble and the mean sitting together.<sup>643</sup> Another report claimed separate arrangements were necessary for people of lower classes to save native gentlemen the trouble and annoyance of sitting with them.<sup>644</sup> Separation was also demanded to avoid injuries to the health of upper-class men from the smell emitted from the bodies of lower-class people.<sup>645</sup> An article expressed this demand in a particularly striking manner by noting the issue as ‘longstanding’. It condemned the ‘extremely improper and unjustifiable’

<sup>640</sup> These arguments should be seen in the wider political and social context of the rise of *swadeshi* movement in Bengal.

<sup>641</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Bhraman’.

<sup>642</sup> Ray, ‘Debganer’.

<sup>643</sup> Oudh Akhbar, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1870 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/47, OIOC.

<sup>644</sup> Koh-i-Nur, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1871 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/48, OIOC.

<sup>645</sup> Idem; Urdu Akhbar, 15<sup>th</sup> October 1871.

practice of seating of sweepers, *chamars*, and like classes of people in the same carriage with Hindustanis of a higher order. This policy was argued to be inconsistent with the tolerant policies pursued by the government and to be extremely offensive to the religious feelings of the people.<sup>646</sup> Demands for separate carriages for people of lower castes and social status continued to be made well into the twentieth century. As late as 1907, a report in *Bangabasi* referred to a petition made by many respectable people to the Viceroy and the railway authorities to set apart separate compartments for orthodox Brahmins.<sup>647</sup>

Similar demands were also extended to include Muslims and Europeans. The editor of a newspaper claimed railway revenue would increase if arrangements were made to provide separate carriages for Hindus and Muslims.<sup>648</sup> Another report demanded separation as Muslim passengers carried meat or killed game with them and, since even the sight of such things was nauseating to Hindus, their carriages should be separated.<sup>649</sup> Demanding separation, a newspaper report referred to a petition sent by the Yatriklesh nivarani sabha to the Viceroy urging reservation of five third class carriages in each train for the exclusive use of Hindus. It described the demand as 'reasonable' and argued for its implementation as it would not involve extra expenditure.<sup>650</sup> That such feelings were not restricted to newspaper articles becomes evident when authors of the travelogues admitted to denying entry to Muslims on the basis of their food habits. Saratchandra Shastri refused Muslim passengers entry into his carriage because he thought their body odour, reeking of garlic and meat, would make the journey unpleasant.<sup>651</sup> Similarly, the main protagonists of Durgacharan Ray's travelogue were repelled by the body odour of Muslim passengers at the ticket booking counter at Saharanpur station and were unable to buy tickets.<sup>652</sup> Indian passengers travelling in upper class carriages also demanded separate arrangements from Europeans. In such cases, demands were framed in a language of cultural and racial difference, and separation was argued to be beneficial for both groups. For instance, the European practice of travelling with their womenfolk, disregarding rules of seclusion, was argued to be an issue which rankled with 'respectable natives', and the latter wanted separate carriages. Or, the European habit of smoking cigars was noted to be as disgusting to Indians as *hookah* smoke was to

<sup>646</sup> Karnamah, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1874 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/51, OIOC.

<sup>647</sup> Bangabasi, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1907 in Selection from Native Newspaper Reports, Bengal, L/R/5/33, 1907, OIOC.

<sup>648</sup> Khair Khwah-i-Alam 15<sup>th</sup> August 1874 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/51, OIOC.

<sup>649</sup> Prayag Samachar 30<sup>th</sup> April 1888 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/65, OIOC.

<sup>650</sup> Bharat Jiwan 5<sup>th</sup> December 1898 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/75, OIOC.

<sup>651</sup> Shastri, 'Dakshinapath'.

<sup>652</sup> Ray, 'Debganer'.

Europeans.<sup>653</sup> Interestingly, this last demand was accepted by the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway Company. The EIRC even introduced reserved third-class carriages for poor Europeans, ostensibly to dissuade them from troubling lower-class Indian passengers.<sup>654</sup> The desire for separate carriages based on caste, status or religious affiliation, however, was never fulfilled. The reasons behind such differential fulfilment of demands have been discussed in earlier chapters.

These arguments bring forth the crucial role of the forced proximity engendered by railways in shaping the notions of identity. They hint at the ways in which the demands of railway travel led to re-configuration of existing ideas of community. For instance, in the demands for separate carriages for lower castes and poor, there was a conflation of two distinct issues – caste and class. Though the overlapping is not surprising, it is also suggestive of assertions of identity based on ideas of entitlement. Some of this was certainly a product of colonialism. The rise of an urban middle class was representative of such changes and, not surprisingly, their new found status was asserted at several levels including railway compartments. On the other hand these demands were based also on ideas of ritual and social superiority which had origins in pre-colonial practices. Many claims emphasised the timelessness of the idea that travelling with ‘untouchables’ was anathema to caste Hindus. Moreover, such ideas were noted to be equally applicable for upper-class Muslims. While the presence of lower-caste passengers and their ‘smelly bodies’ were noted to be discomfiting to Hindus, they were argued to be equally objectionable to well-bred Muslims. This argument had a dual function. *One*, it transformed the issue from the particular to the universal and was probably done to bring more pressure on the railway authorities. And *two*, the claim that the presence of lower-castes was objectionable only to *well-bred* Muslims lent credence to the idea that Muslims from non-genteel backgrounds were lower-caste Hindu converts. As such, it was implied, they would have no problem sharing space with their own kind.<sup>655</sup>

The demands for separate carriages for Hindus and Muslims also drew upon notions of identity which had long and complex histories. The cleavage between Hindu and Muslim communities was not only a result of the political developments of the late nineteenth century. But religious identities, as Peter Van Der Veer’s work reminds us, were not ‘primordial’, and went through transformations in keeping with the demands of changing

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<sup>653</sup> Tafrih, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1899 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/76, OIOC.

<sup>654</sup> Report of the Consulting Engineer to the Government on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway for the financial year 1873-74, in V/24/3582, OIOC.

<sup>655</sup> For a discussion on the evolution of idea of caste among Indian Muslims, see, Ray, ‘The felt’.

socio-political contexts.<sup>656</sup> Colonial administrative decisions played a part in defining these identities. The demands for separate carriages, in order to extend the official promise of respecting religious and caste laws, underline both the significance of colonial policies in shaping identities, and the uses made of an imagined or re-constructed past. Perhaps it can be argued that the colonial encounter and the railway experiences transformed existing notions of identity by adding new dynamics, especially to express the idea of material or political entitlement.

Railway experiences also provided a new forum for expressing notions of gender roles and identities. Railway carriages posed a threat to the ideas of female seclusion prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century India. One has to be careful of generalisation because even before the coming of the railways many women travelled without strict codes of seclusion.<sup>657</sup> The railways, however, magnified the possibility of interaction between sexes in the railway carriages, by bringing increased proximity between travellers within a small space. This drew new attention to existing ideas of privacy and seclusion. Initially reserved accommodation was introduced in the first class carriages of the EIRC in 1865. The following year the facility was extended to the second class, and by 1867 third class carriages were fitted for accommodation of 'native' females.<sup>658</sup> The need for providing separate arrangements to attract 'native' female passenger was apparent to the railway companies as well as the government agencies. The Government of India admitted the necessity in regard to 'native females of upper classes who desired to travel by railway. In a letter the Officiating Engineer to the Government of India observed that 'the custom of the country require ladies, both Hindoo and Mahomedans, to travel in privacy, and the Governor-General in Council considers that due consideration should be paid to this circumstance and so far as is practicable, suitable arrangements made to meet the requirements of the case.'<sup>659</sup>

An enquiry was instituted asking the Government of Bengal to furnish information about the provision of carriages and compartments for the use of 'native' females of rank. In response the Government of Bengal initiated an enquiry at the local level and collected information on the subject from other provinces. It was found out that no single, uniform practice existed for providing special accommodation for 'native' ladies on railways. Further,

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<sup>656</sup> Van Der Veer, 'Religious'.

<sup>657</sup> This is especially true of women belonging to low caste or class.

<sup>658</sup> 'Reserved accommodation for native females travelling by rail', letter from Cecil Stephenson, dated 20<sup>th</sup> April 1869, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/47, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>659</sup> 'Special Accommodation for native females travelling by rail', from Colonel R. Strachey, Officiating Engineer to the Government of India, PWD, to the Officiating Joint Secretary to the Government of Bengal, PWD, April 1869, in Proceedings of the Railway Department, Government of Bengal, P/433/46, 1869, OIOC.

the enquiry revealed that the ‘native gentry’ was unhappy with the arrangements hitherto in force. The main objections were that women were unable to observe the habits of seclusion ‘common in the east’, and *two*, the women were entirely separated from their own male relatives, usually husbands.<sup>660</sup> The suggestions offered by the ‘respectable natives’ were difficult to implement, however, as they required additional expense to manufacture new carriages or to modify the existing rolling stock. Interestingly, the government agencies argued that the prevailing facilities were already sufficient for the ‘richer and respectable’ classes, because women of ‘commoner classes’ were always visible to everyone.<sup>661</sup>

The question of female seclusion in the railway carriages remained an important issue throughout the colonial period, though at no time was this debate primarily about women: it was about some women, but mainly about men and status. The form and contents of these arguments, however, provide occasions to understand the impact of the demands of railway travel practices on notions of gender identity. In the mid-nineteenth century the debate mainly centred on the feasibility of offering upper-class women appropriate facilities to maintain their habits of seclusion, and on the benefits of railway travel upon ‘female habits’.<sup>662</sup> By the early twentieth century however, a distinct shift is noticeable in the terms of the debate – now, the question was no longer about the purported benefits of railway travel on women. This was partly because by now women had been travelling by railway for approximately half-a-century. But, more importantly, by the turn of the century the image of women and their role in national imagination, had undergone a transformation; and women (and the female body) increasingly came to symbolise national or religious or ethnic pride.<sup>663</sup> From around this time any crime against ‘native’ female passengers was interpreted as symbolic of an assault on India’s honour and pride.<sup>664</sup> Given this, it can be argued that the railway experiences, and the demands created by a new set of travel practices underlined traditional gender roles and identities. The railway sites and space was appropriated by both Indian and European males to perpetuate attitudes which legitimised segregation. Further, these notions

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<sup>660</sup> Idem.

<sup>661</sup> Minute by Sir W. Muir, Lieutenant Governor, NWP, on the provision of separate carriage or compartments for respectable native women travelling by railway, in Railway Letters and Enclosures from Bengal and India, L/PWD/3/70, 1869, OIOC.

<sup>662</sup> Idem.

<sup>663</sup> The literature on ‘women’s question’ in colonial India is vast, for a useful overview see, K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds) *Recasting women: essays in Indian colonial history* (New Jersey, 1990), also, T. Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: community, religion and cultural nationalism* (London, 2001).

<sup>664</sup> L. Bear, *Lines of the Nation: Indian railway workers, bureaucracy and the intimate historical self* (New York, 2007). Bear rightly notes that it was this changing symbolism of women which led to publicise any cases of assault on lower class/caste women.

were expressed on the basis of status. Middle-class Indians repeatedly demanded separate carriages for prostitutes or dancing girls, so that these women would not get a chance to corrupt ‘innocent respectable women’. Such attitudes underline the desire to enforce female segregation as a basis of social rank and respectability. The government agencies, the railway companies and the ‘respectable natives’- all agreed that female seclusion was mainly practiced by women of rank and thereby should only be given to them. This convergence of opinion is hardly surprising because after 1845, railway companies in Britain had also begun to supply class differentiated ladies’ compartments to allay the fears of ‘respectable’ women of possible sexual molestation in physically isolated train compartments.<sup>665</sup> In India, such sentiments affected women without changing the ways in which most women travelled, because most of them could not afford to buy tickets for upper-class carriages. More importantly, it can be argued that these sentiments, pushed to their logical conclusion, indicate that neither Indian nor Europeans males considered lower-class women as worthy or deserving of respect. It also shows, as noted in chapters one and three, that ideas of rank and status influenced railway policies as much as (if not more than) notions of race.

As the foregoing discussion suggests, railway journeys offered sites for exploring and asserting community identities primarily due to enforced proximity. There were many such occasions in the changing conditions of colonial India, but none as arbitrary or intimate as railway travel. Other occasions of proximity occurred, for instance in the cities. But many neighbourhoods remained segregated and upper-class houses were often inward-looking with women’s quarters. Proximity also occurred in factories, but patterns of recruitment (through jobbers) often replicated rural caste and family ties. During festivals and fairs too, people experienced intimacy. But such cross-class and cross-community participation could be said to be voluntary, or even consciously transgressive of the norms, for a stipulated period. Railways were an enforced transgression, not limited as to time, on a site associated with the challenge of colonial modernity and colonialism. There were not that many other such sites, especially as the government was keenly aware of, or indeed inclined to exaggerate, the differences between Indians. Given this, perhaps it was not without reason that in two separate incidents demands were raised by Hindus and Sikhs respectively to ban the sale of beef on railway platforms.<sup>666</sup> Or, that a newspaper report complained about the alleged

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<sup>665</sup> J. Simmons, *The railways in England and Wales, 1830-1914: the system and its working* (Leicester, 1978).

<sup>666</sup> Dabdaba-i-Qaisari, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1890 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/67, OIOC.



indulgence shown by a Hindu ticket inspector to his co-religionists while he was harassing Muslims to the point of forcing them to bribe him.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Mehr-i-Nimroz, 21<sup>st</sup> August 1895 in Selections from Native Newspaper Reports, NWP, L/R/5/72, OIOC.

## II

Railways provided opportunities for observation and contact to reflect upon another variant of the 'self' and 'other' theme. This was a comparison between Indians and Europeans or rather between India and Europe. Technology was a major issue in assessing civilizations, and railways were its most obvious illustration. Occasionally this appraisal was also affected by the actual experiences of travelling with Europeans or encountering railway officials. Railway journeys have often been identified as a site of discord, symptomatic of wider socio-political and racial differences characterising Indo- British relations.<sup>668</sup> But these encounters could also give rise to more ambivalent assessment of the 'other', eliciting even respect, as well as antagonism based on race. None of the travelogues record any unpleasant occurrences while travelling with Europeans. Bharatendu Harishchandra even shared jokes with his European fellow passenger and claimed 'well-bred Europeans' were more likely to be better behaved and well-disposed towards Indians.<sup>669</sup> On one hand these experiences point towards an evident though oft-overlooked possibility of class re-configuring race relations. On the other, it is instructive that most authors admitted the desire to share their experiences was a corrective to the general notion of Europeans as not-so-agreeable travel companions. Prasannamayee Devi declared it her 'duty' to inform readers that the English couple with whom she shared her second-class carriage for a night-long journey were pleasant and agreeable and their behaviour did not conform to the usual image of 'arrogant Europeans ill-treating niggers.'<sup>670</sup>

The encounters with European railway officials too, shaped notions of identity, along racial lines. Interestingly, for these authors, European officials symbolised order and willingness to address grievances. This was in sharp contrast to their opinion of Eurasian or Indian railway employees. While it is not surprising that these authors scorned the authority and power enjoyed by the Eurasians,<sup>671</sup> their denunciation of Indian employees is surprising.

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<sup>668</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri has noted how for many Indian nationalists experiences of racial discrimination were heightened by unpleasant railway experiences. See T. Raychaudhuri, *Europe reconsidered: perceptions of west in nineteenth century Bengal* (New Delhi, 2002).

<sup>669</sup> B. Harishchandra, *Janakpur ki Yatra* in Harishchandra Samagra, Volume III, OIOC. Europeans too, often commented that Indians of genteel background made better co-passengers.

<sup>670</sup> P. Devi, 'Aryavarta'.

<sup>671</sup> Several authors have rightly noted the scorn against Eurasians railway employees was a product of disdain towards their racially mixed identity and also their low economic status. Railway was one of the biggest employers of Eurasians in India and these authors thought it had made Eurasians social upstarts. See, L. Bear, *Lines of the nation: Indian railway workers, bureaucracy and the intimate historical self* (New York, 2007).

Indian employees were particularly noted for their proclivity to demand bribes.<sup>672</sup> It would be easy to dismiss these observations as either insignificant stray incidents or the internalisation of a colonial stereotype by ‘subaltern elites’,<sup>673</sup> what needs to be underlined is how these experiences question our understanding of the construction of identity in colonial India, especially around railway encounters.

The inconsistency of these experiences also permeated attitudes towards technology. As noted already, for most authors, railway operations were a visible proof of European superiority, especially the possession of specialised scientific knowledge. The terms of this comparison therefore were influenced by a technology-affected prestige enjoyed by the colonial state. This gap in technical knowledge was interpreted as symptomatic of a larger deficiency of India which had led to her political subjugation. Most often an initial discussion about railway technology gave way to a social and political analysis in which attempts were made to look for the reasons for India’s political fate. In other words, to these authors, railways made plain the links between technical knowledge, territorial expansion, and political control. Because of this awareness, these authors genuinely appreciated the power of steam. The appreciation was possibly a part of the nineteenth-century obsession with technology; and most of these authors, though aware of the political context of this technology transfer, were genuinely hopeful that it would eventually prove beneficial to the Indian economy and society. And this belief perhaps was also responsible for the ambivalence towards technology and its impact.

The initial response to the railway experience was one of admiration. The technical aspects of railways – the working of the engines, the permanent way, the tunnels, the bridges and the embankments, the printing of tickets and, last but not least, the experience of travelling over miles within a matter of hours, all were acknowledged as wonderful. Since all these were novel, some of the earlier travelogues also explained the mechanics of railway technology. Writing as early as 1844, Pandit Ratneshwar’s account anticipated the introduction of railways in India. He was shown the mechanics of railway operations by a European member of the Bombay College. He also wrote a detailed account of this demonstration, and noted how, with the application of fire, water was converted to steam and this in turn moved the piston which ultimately set the wheels of the engine carriage in

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<sup>672</sup> For more on this see chapter four.

<sup>673</sup> In the colonial stereotype Europeans were described as upright and honest in contrast to Indians who were prone to chicanery and lie.

motion.<sup>674</sup> Similarly, one of the earliest tracts in Bengali around the railway theme also explained the working of the *kaler gadi* by describing it as an iron carriage with wheels made of iron and running on iron tracks.<sup>675</sup> By the late nineteenth century, however, travellers and readers had become sufficiently familiar with the mechanics of the steam engine, and their attention was drawn to other aspects of railway technology such as the tunnels and the bridges. Travelling on the branch line connecting Teenpahar and Rajmahal, Baradakanta Sengupta praised the technical skills of the EIRC's engineers, especially in the manner in which they laid the permanent way through the hills of Rajmahal.<sup>676</sup> Haricharan Bandyopadhyay found the Munger tunnel impressive and praise worthy.<sup>677</sup> Both Saratchandra Shastri and Surendranath Ray were impressed by the grandeur of the Victoria Terminus at Bombay as well as by the engineering skills displayed in the construction of the Bhore Ghat and Thal Ghat inclines connecting the Western Ghats to the rest of India. Maximum praise seems to have been reserved for the railway bridges. The bridges over the Soane, the ones over the Yamuna at Allahabad and over the Ganges at Benaras - all were widely admired. Dinanath Gangopadhyay even dedicated two stanzas in his travelogue to describe his feelings after looking at the Yamuna Bridge at Allahabad.<sup>678</sup>

Apart from being wonder-struck at these technical feats, the authors were also appreciative of the application of scientific knowledge to everyday use and approved of the advantages that accrued from it. Even while anticipating the introduction of railway, Pandit Ratneshwar argued that technology could prove particularly beneficial for 'countries' struck by famine.<sup>679</sup> The ability of steam technology to transform everyday life was also highlighted in a Bengali tract written by Akshay Kumar Dutta. Published in 1855, shortly after the introduction of the railway in eastern India, this tract informed its readers about the myriad benefits of steam locomotion which included quicker return for home-sick people working far away and safer travel for pregnant women to their natal homes.<sup>680</sup> The author of *Ki majar kaler gadi* also listed various uses of the new transport technology most notably the possibility of daily commuting due to the rail links between the suburbs and the city of Calcutta.<sup>681</sup> Writing in the same year as Dutta, Kalidas Moitra counted commercial

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<sup>674</sup> Ratneshwar, 'Patramalika'.

<sup>675</sup> Al-Din, 'Ki Majar'.

<sup>676</sup> Sengupta, 'Bharat'.

<sup>677</sup> Bandyopadhyay, 'Bhraman'.

<sup>678</sup> Gangopadhyay, 'Vivadha'.

<sup>679</sup> Ratneshwar, 'Patramalika'.

<sup>680</sup> Dutta, 'Bashpiya'.

<sup>681</sup> Al-din, 'Ki majar'.

expansion, material prosperity and even easy troop mobilisation among railways' purported benefits.<sup>682</sup>

But, as noted earlier, the appreciation of railway technology and the belief in its probable benefits were intertwined with the awareness of its being foreign. In other words, there was ambivalence about this technology. The political context of this 'transfer of technology' was never far from any discussion acknowledging its uses. Kalidas Moitra's tract contextualised the introduction of the railway as part of a wider scheme which had earlier led to the introduction of steam boats on rivers across India. Azim-al-din's tract opened with praise for the mechanical skills needed for railway operations and he identified this skill as *bilati*, highlighting both its foreign origin as well as the fact that its possession was confined to the *sahibs*. He also reminded his readers that they were 'fortunate' to be born in an age when this 'English machine' using fire and water operated and made their life easy.<sup>683</sup> For Azim-al-din the harnessing of fire and water, two opposing natural forces - symbolised a miraculous achievement which English knowledge had made possible. He was not alone in viewing this ability to control natural forces as uniquely English; many of these authors underline this ethnic link. But interestingly, for most of them this ability to control and manipulate natural forces was also symptomatic of the British military and political supremacy. In other words, it was argued, if the British could make fire and water work together, it was no wonder that they had expanded their control over much of the earth's territory. Dinanath Gangopadhyay thought the ability of the 'white men' to make fire and water together was a technical marvel which enabled machines to work on land as well as water. This achievement, he argued symbolised the control over the five forces of nature. For him, the gleaming iron bridge over Yamuna at Allahabad epitomised the 'white man's' ability to control and manipulate nature.<sup>684</sup> He recorded the structure of the bridge in great detail. The stone columns of the bridge were described as sentinels who were 'mocking the sister of Yama'; and the iron girders were the 'armour' of these sentinels.<sup>685</sup> He wrote how each effort of the waves of the river to assail the iron and stone structure went in vain and instead the river received only insult and disdain. It is interesting to note that, though appreciative, the author chooses his words carefully. Words such as 'sentinels', 'armour' or 'insult', are suggestive of a mood that conveyed at once the possession of 'unassailable' technology by the British and also their control over the land and its resources.

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<sup>682</sup> Moitra, 'Bashpiya'

<sup>683</sup> Al-din, 'Ki majar'.

<sup>684</sup> Gangopadhyay, 'Vivadha'.

<sup>685</sup> Idem, in Hindu mythology the river Yamuna is sister of Yama – the god of death.

The author of *Debganer martye* Agaman was even more forthcoming about the link between scientific skill, ethnic identity and territorial expansion.<sup>686</sup> Durgacharan Ray identified this scientific knowledge as specifically British. In his travelogue narrating the railway travel experiences of the Hindu Gods, the author sets the tone by declaring that the splendour of Calcutta – the capital of the British Empire - will make even *Amaravati* pale in comparison. Among the factors adding to the grandeur of Calcutta were technical achievements like electrical lighting and piped water supply and the Gods were requested to see these miracles by a visit to the city travelling by railway. While narrating these English technical achievements, the author linked the possession of scientific knowledge to military aggrandisement by ‘warning’ these Gods of the possibility of the British invading heaven by laying a railway. Later in the text, he revived this theme of manipulation of nature, control over territory and loss of sovereignty, in an even more direct manner. He narrated an incident when a technical snag developed in the train as it passed over the Soane Bridge and the passengers were forced to alight. As the Gods stood admiring the bridge, their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of the river Soane who lay prostrate at the feet of the Gods. The river started to lament its ill-fate and attributed his ‘bloody’ appearance to the constant friction from the wheels of the train. Soane argued: ‘if India is destined to be un-free, so be it. But why should the rivers of India suffer the same fate? Why should we be tied in chains; and why should the rivers of India be also denied the pleasure of freedom?’<sup>687</sup> The river showed the scars on his body and declared that the English were not content with controlling the river, but also mocked its misery by painting the columns of the bridge in red as if symbolising its bloodied existence. Railway tunnels too came to be described in similar terms. Haricharan Bandyopadhyay thought that the Jamalpur hills were a ‘challenge’ thrown by nature to obstruct the march of the railway lines as mother earth was unable to bear any more of the oppression of the railway company.<sup>688</sup>

For these authors railway technology demonstrated the inadequacies of the Indian system of knowledge especially scientific and technical skills. Some of the authors even expressed scepticism about Indians’ ability to acquire these skills because they thought they were ‘inherited traits.’ After a visit to the Ganges canal at Roorkee, poet Nabinchandra Sen wrote: ‘once upon a time a certain western scientist identified the strength of steam after observing the moving lid of a boiling water vessel. Today his progeny is applying that

<sup>686</sup> The more direct and strident approach may be attributed to the time of the publication of the text in 1885, when anti-colonial sentiments were already gaining ground.

<sup>687</sup> Ray, ‘Debganer’.

<sup>688</sup> Bandyopadhyay, ‘Bhraman’.

knowledge to run steamships in water and steam-engines on land.’<sup>689</sup> Kedar Nath Das also chose heredity to explain his surprise at the sight of the bridge over the Soane.<sup>690</sup> The author noted: ‘even after thousand years of continuous labour, neither Bengali nor Hindustani architectural and engineering skill could erect a single column over the Soane-bed.’ He added: ‘for those [whose] technical skill is limited to invention of *dhenki*, *kulo* and *charkha* the building of a bridge over the shallow sand bed and fording mighty rivers is well beyond their ability.’ ‘Native intelligence’, he argued, was incapable of acquiring the nuances of Western intelligence. And he mocked at the practice of attributing grand structures to the mythical sculptor Vishwakarma. He sarcastically commented: ‘if Vishwakarma could have built the temple of Jagannath at Puri, then these structures [railway bridges] may well have been built by his great-grandfather.’

This disdain for indigenous tradition was perhaps a reflection of a loss of belief in the utility and achievements of a system of knowledge in a rapidly changing and unequal political context; or, it may also have been a protest based on an exaggeration of the enormity of what was being lost. Such feelings were aptly conveyed by Azim-ul-din in the opening lines of his tract. While praising *sahibs*’ skill in building the railway he suggested his readers should give up worshipping *Vishwakarma* and pray to the *sahib* instead.<sup>691</sup> Radhacharan Goswami echoed similar thoughts. In his opinion even a glimpse of the railway workshops was enough to subdue Brahma’s and even Vishwakarma’s ego and pride.<sup>692</sup> According to him, the Gods had made several attempts to reproduce the technology; but, peeved by their failures, they even tried to destroy the bridges and the railway lines by flooding. But the railway network remained unaffected, effectively crushing divine as well as natural forces. Not surprisingly, to the authors of these texts possession of superior scientific knowledge appeared a crucial component in the comparison between Europeans and Indians. They identified western knowledge as a significant factor which had transformed Britain into an imperial power; and acknowledged the advantages afforded by this knowledge. But they ruled out any wholesale rejection of the indigenous knowledge system in favour of western scientific training. This refusal was based on a simple argument that Indian knowledge system was not inadequate per se, but that for generations Indians had ignored and rejected the logical elements of their tradition while embracing the romantic and superstitious aspects.

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<sup>689</sup> Sen, ‘Prabaser’.

<sup>690</sup> Das, ‘Bharatbarsher’.

<sup>691</sup> Al-din, ‘Ki majar’.

<sup>692</sup> R. Goswami, ‘Railway Stotra’ in K. Shishir (Ed), *Radhacharan Goswami ki chuni rachnayein* (Allahabad, 1990).

Evidently, these authors represent a diverse spectrum of opinion and attitudes to technology. There is an obvious admiration of technology as great and impressive. As also the admittance that the lack of technology made Indians inferior, maybe inherently so, and therefore India's traditions need re-furbishment. An absence of technical expertise also explained the conquest of India. But by linking technology with territorial expansion and dominance, these authors also made a case for objecting to the conquest and for refusing to abandon their indigenous system of knowledge. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this called for a re-appraisal of the admiration felt for the Europeans as repositories of superior, specialised knowledge. It also offered an opportunity to appraise indigenous knowledge in a favourable light. It even enabled the authors to locate the origins of contemporary western scientific theories and technical skills in traditional Indian knowledge. The aim was to diminish the novelty of the steam technology by indigenising its principles and claiming parity with western training and knowledge.

As early as 1855 Kalidas Moitra cited a reference to the use of a steam-operated 'machine' from *Srimadbhagvat*.<sup>693</sup> The author admitted steam locomotion in its 'present form' was invented in England, but claimed that ancient Indians were also aware of the power of steam and harnessed it for travelling. This claim was substantiated by quoting an excerpt from the tenth section of *Srimadbhagvat* which has a reference to *Saubhag* – a steam machine which could move in water, air and land. Further, this machine was used by a King to invade his enemy's territory. It is interesting to note that the chosen excerpt not only located India's use of steam technology as pre-dating its discovery in England; it also confirmed the link between the possession of technical knowledge and military invasion. Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri felt his 'admiration' for the railway lines winding up to the hill stations of Darjeeling, Shillong and Cherrapunji was 'misplaced' because they did not appear impressive when compared to the achievements of the Indians artisans who had sculpted the caves of Udayagiri and Khandagiri. Looking at the two thousand year old sculptures and stone carvings in these caves he 'realised' Indian artisans had possessed advanced technical skill and knowledge at a time when the English race did not even exist.<sup>694</sup>

These attitudes reveal not only the diversity of responses to technology, but also a desire to contest European superiority. The argument was: technology is impressive, but India had it first. And Indian values of spirituality and non-materiality are even superior. Moreover, these values were remnants of an old civilization, which reached fruition when Europeans

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<sup>693</sup> Moitra, 'Bashpiya'.

<sup>694</sup> Raychaudhuri, 'Vivadha'.



were cave-dwellers. Interestingly, this belief was a reflected idea brought to India mainly from the Scottish Enlightenment, emphasising the evolution of civilization in stages over time, with India being stuck at an earlier level. In spite of locating admirable attainments in the past, these Indian authors were unable to find any traces of glory in their present. Worse still, the loss of political freedom was galling. The authors tried hard to explain the ‘fall’ of Indian civilization which was also a crucial link in the chain of comparison between Indians and Europeans. The argument was: if Indians have been equal, if not superior to Europeans in the past, then what led to their reversal of fortunes? The answer, not surprisingly, was found in the Muslim interregnum. The military defeats at the hands of the Muslims were argued to have led not only to political subjugation, but eventually to a forced imposition of alien manners, customs and social rules. These degraded the Indian (Hindu) society and finally led to its downfall. Hindu achievements and knowledge slowly eroded and an intellectual stagnation set in, that hindered the growth of technical knowledge and prevented Indians (Hindus) from pursuing scientific knowledge. This explained the inability of Indians to discover the uses of steam technology or to make similar scientific achievements. The degeneration caused by Muslim rule eventually led to the establishment of the East India Company’s rule and the subsequent subjugation of India by the British Crown. By this logic Muslim rulers were as much foreign to India as the British, or rather worse because for many of these authors English rule was more promising and benign than Muslim.

### III

Through these discussions about disparities in technical knowledge and civilisational attainments, the authors also formulated a notion of collective citizenship – an identity based on nationality, and expressed as a shared sentiment. It expanded the ambit of communities based on linguistic or regional affiliations into a wider, national identity. Here too, railways played a crucial role, as it was an important site for re-assessment and re-configurations of being ‘Indian’. The experiences of railway journeys were framed in terms of ‘we’ as Indians, and distinct from Europeans. Railway journeys also provided occasions of experiencing difference, either suffering or witnessing explicit acts of racial discrimination, or by travelling through the princely states. Most often these sentiments were expressed as an evaluation of the colonial rule. Interestingly, many authors admired or even praised aspects of colonial rule. Baradakanta Sengupta thought the printing press and the contribution of missionaries of Srirampur was one of the most positive aspects. The secret of Bengal’s progress, he argued,

lay in Srirampur; and Bengalis should be proud of its impact in transforming the Bengali language and in popularising print and education.<sup>695</sup> He even suggested the Sanskrit hymn praising the five virtuous women of Hindu mythology should be re-written favour of Marshman and his team who had lived to improve the condition of Indians (Bengalis). Similarly, Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri expressed his admiration for the canal network in Orissa and compared it favourably with the public works built by the Hindu kings of Orissa. The canals, he thought, would bring prosperity to Orissa by combatting the scourge of famine.<sup>696</sup> For the likes of Kalidas Moitra, Kedar Nath Das and Navinchandra Sen, ‘Pax Britannica’ was the most admired contribution of colonial rule. Navinchandra Sen was particularly impressed by the school at Jabalpur which trained erstwhile *thugs* in vocations such as carpet weaving. He was appreciative of the products made in this school and credited the colonial administration with transforming members of a ‘criminal tribe’ into law-abiding members of the society.<sup>697</sup> Kedar Nath Das described the English as ‘saviours’ of ordinary Indians from warring and recalcitrant Indian rulers. He praised the English for pacifying and subjugating those ‘little lords who deluded themselves as Gods and exploited their people.’<sup>698</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss these thoughts as product of colonised minds which had come to believe the propaganda of the Raj; but it is instructive to note that these authors were also critical of colonial rule and its discriminatory practices. The ambiguities and complexities became pronounced as the authors travelled beyond the boundaries of British India. As noted in an earlier chapter, the travel itineraries were more or less fixed, and a visit to Rajputana or Western India was mandatory. As a result, most authors travelled through the princely states dotting these regions. This triggered a comparison of the administrative systems of two distinct, though not necessarily opposing forms of governance. Saratchandra Shastri was so ‘impressed’ by the administration of the Baroda State that he described in detail the functioning of the departments of education, industry and law.<sup>699</sup> For Nabinchandra Sen it was the easy yet expedient methods of dispensing justice which made a favourable impact in the court of Jaipur. He thought that, unlike in British territories, subjects in Jaipur were not trampled by incomprehensible legal jargon and ‘blood-sucking lawyers.’<sup>700</sup> The

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<sup>695</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>696</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Bhraman’.

<sup>697</sup> Sen, ‘Prabaser’.

<sup>698</sup> Das, ‘Bharatbarsher’.

<sup>699</sup> Shastri, ‘Dakshinapath’.

<sup>700</sup> Sen, ‘Prabaser’.

legal system was also reminiscent of the ways in which the ancient Hindu states governed, and Sen lamented the loss of this ‘simplicity.’

Baradakanta Sengupta compared the ‘native’ administration of Rajputana favourably to the British one<sup>701</sup> - significantly, he used the word *deshiya*. It hints at an awareness of the differences in the forms of administration which were imported from Europe and thus by logic foreign. The lack of strict discipline in Rajputana’s administrative matters, he argued, was compensated for by empathy towards the subjects and as a result they were not miserable. He was not alone in thinking that the inhabitants of the princely states were materially better off than their counterparts in British India. Saratchandra Shastri was struck by the general prosperity of the people of Baroda. Similarly, the manager of the Bengal Circus noted: ‘the benevolence of native rulers allowed their subjects to prosper.’<sup>702</sup> This sentiment was a product of his visit to Bundelkhand which coincided with a famine in the region. He described in great detail the relief measures implemented by the ruler of Charkhari, a small princely state in the region. He compared them with the ‘inadequate’ measures adopted by the British administration in their territory, and noted the steady trickle of people who crossed over to take advantage of Charkhari’s better-managed relief measures.

These inadequacies were blamed for Indians feeling increasingly disenchanted with the British rule. Baradakanta Sengupta noted that Indians had turned seditious because British rule had failed to deliver good governance. He made a causal connection between Indians’ lack of loyalty and the failure of the British government to treat them well, and argued that if the British authorities had been fair to their Indian subjects then they would have been rewarded by loyalty since Indians consider fealty to their rulers as *dharma*.<sup>703</sup> This argument, though very much a part of the growing anti-colonial feelings in late nineteenth-century India, was in fact drawn from a much older discourse about rights of the subjects and the duties of the rulers.<sup>704</sup> In this discourse, empathy, among other things, was expected from the rulers and they were rewarded by loyalty. In this case, since the rulers (British) had failed in their duties, the loyalty of their subjects (Indians) was wavering.

Kedar Nath Das thought discrimination the main drawback of the colonial rule. He identified race as the operative logic behind the unequal treatment of Indians and Europeans. He argued: black people are subjected to humiliation at every stage, and their concerns are never redressed. Nor did their comfort, pleasure, or needs ever matter to the *sahibs*.

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<sup>701</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>702</sup> Professor Bose, *Professor Bose r apurva bhraman Vrittanta* (Calcutta, 1879).

<sup>703</sup> Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>704</sup> Bayly, ‘Origins’.

Highlighting the link between the loss of political freedom for Indians and the monopoly of violence enjoyed by the colonial state, Das noted that *sahibs* had the ‘right’ to be arrogant because they were winners and thus were ‘expected’ to exude pride and superiority; but he claimed, they should also be concerned about the welfare of people. An earlier generation of *sahibs* had treated ‘natives’ well. Interestingly, here too, an older political tradition was invoked to underline the connection between fair governance and the reactions of the subjects. The author’s political prescription included following a ‘middle-path’. He identified two opposing and extreme positions which were shaping popular opinion about British rule. The first praised and idolised anything and everything which was English, while the second one was its exact opposite. For the author both these positions were injurious because their followers failed to appreciate any virtue in the other position and therefore did not achieve anything worthwhile.<sup>705</sup>

Discrimination was also at the centre of Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri’s critique of colonial rule. Travelling across Orissa he visited the abandoned salt manufactories of Balasore and trenchantly criticised the salt law. He followed this by a general condemnation of colonial administrative policies. These abandoned salt factories, he argued, were a proof of the English government’s misrule and exploitation. He noted, that the government discriminated against Orissa’s salt even though it was of higher quality than that of Liverpool. He accused the English government of nepotism and claimed: ‘they will never be absolved of the crime of systematically ruining one of the most profitable businesses of India.’ He regretted the failure of the Oriyas to reverse the government’s measure despite a consistent campaign, and prophesied that this policy of discrimination and divide and rule would eventually lead to the downfall of the British Empire.<sup>706</sup>

All these examples arose in the context of railway journeys and the experiences engendered by them. They were interpreted in ways that had wider implications. By bringing together more people railways sharpened identities. Meeting a wider range of people created both unifying and differentiating impulses. While on one hand identities became less localised and broader, on the other they were also defined in a more particularistic or parochial manner. For instance, while the railway experiences led the authors of the Bengali travelogues to imagine themselves as Indians, they also steered them to refine their Bengali identity.

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<sup>705</sup> Das, ‘Bharatbarsher’.

<sup>706</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Bhraman’.

This chapter has attempted an assessment of the role of the railways in shaping the notion of identity and community in colonial India. The experience of railway journeys and the practices and sites associated with railway travel have been argued to have had a crucial impact on the expressions of individual and collective identities. The conditions of railway travel brought people into close physical proximity for several hours and this experience was quite unlike any other previous experiences of transport. It brought a wider range of people together and triggered a complex formulation of notions of identity and community. As section one showed, the initial process of identity formation began with a classification of people or fellow passengers on the basis of their physical features. It was followed by a more complex categorisation when differences and hierarchies were explored and asserted through notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Railway encounters led to norms of behaviour being established, and these eventually came to be regarded as characteristic of specific groups of people. In addition, these experiences were understood and interpreted in ways which led to a reassessment of identities.

This is most evident in the manner in which the authors of the travelogues perceived and interpreted the role of railway technology in formulating an Indian identity. For the British, as is well known, railway technology represented the intellectual and civilisational gap between Indians and them. It was a visible proof of their superior status and knowledge. But as the second section showed, the message conveyed by steam engines was much more ambiguously interpreted by Indians than imagined by the colonial state. The responses to railway technology were complex. Most authors interpreted it as a welcome boon and even prestigious without any particular nationalistic concerns. Yet they underlined the political context of its introduction to India. Moreover, while some treated railway technology as symbols of Indian inadequacy or decline (fall from civilisational glory), others made it a part of an effort to re-assert Indian merit. They traced the origins of contemporary western scientific theories to traditional Indian knowledge. Still others like Durgacharan Ray issued subversive political warnings. In spite of an admiration for railway technology or a belief in its potential, eventually a point was reached when the idea came to be expressed that technology could not be de-coupled from nationality. In addition, its neutrality and utility came to be questioned most notably by M.K. Gandhi, although Nehru and many others saw technology as the answer for India, and this admiration was exemplified in the formation of the Planning Commission. This fascinating genealogy perhaps holds the clue to

understanding how the responses to this new technology ranged from admiration and imitation to self-respect.<sup>707</sup>

It is important to analyse these diverse responses to railway technology also because it was used to reassess identities. For instance, though the idea of Muslim rule leading to India's degeneration and downfall was not something new, it was re-applied in the context of the pursuit of technical skills and knowledge. The result was not just a vilification of the Muslim rule, but also the definition of Muslims as foreigners and aggressors who were denied any claims to India or to a shared past.<sup>708</sup> This is relevant to the assessment of the railway experience on India. As noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the crucial point about these interpretations is that they were meant to be read by a wider audience. Being written in Indian languages, their target audience was mainly literate Indians. But it is difficult to agree with the suggestion that was an attempt to 'interiorise' ideas about India's past and convey them to an Indian audience by writers who could not 'shake off the silent presence of the west.'<sup>709</sup> Especially if we allow for the active surveillance measures taken by the colonial state to monitor sentiments expressed in the vernacular press, it is evident that these authors were using these texts to contest the claims of the colonial administration. These writers were not 'second guessing' the response of the colonial state; they were engaging with it through the medium of languages which gave them the advantage of sharing their ideas with the widest audience possible.

Though their entry point was colonial ethnography, yet these authors used it to create radically different images of the 'self' and the 'other', with the exception of the image of the Muslims which matched the colonial stereotype. More importantly, these definitions were used to convey broader ideas with significant social and political import and to reassess notions of identity. The self-image of Bengalis as it emerges from these texts illustrates this point well. Starting from the stereotype of effeminacy, the Bengali 'self' came to be defined in a more strident manner. A claim was mainly based on the access to education. In opposition to this self-image, the 'other' was defined over a range from 'uncivilised Biharis' to 'entrepreneurial but politically meek Marathis'. The upshot was a claim for Bengali political as well as social leadership and a simultaneous rejection or at least contestation of

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<sup>707</sup> It is difficult to establish a chronological evolution simply because these responses continued to co-exist even with Gandhi's complete denouncement of technology especially the railways. See, M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmedabad, 1984).

<sup>708</sup> Logically this meant a denial to shared present (because they too were foreigners) and more importantly, a refusal or at least reluctance to envisage them in India's future.

<sup>709</sup> Chatterjee, 'Discovering'.

the colonial claim that Bengalis were weak and effeminate. This highly selective and qualified use of colonial ethnographic descriptions indicates that Indians' opinions were not a mere reflection of these positions. The contrary idea of internalised attitudes is appealing probably because it identifies the colonial intervention as the starting point of social differentiation in India. By so doing it almost denies the pre-colonial past any agency to initiate social (or economic) change, and as a result comes alarmingly close to the colonial claim that India was inert before the arrival of the British.

It is undeniable that the colonial administrative policies, especially the processes of definition and enumeration, changed the nature of identities and made them more rigid. It also cannot be denied, however, that these policies drew upon notions of community and identity which pre-dated colonial administration.<sup>710</sup> The process perhaps is most evident in the construction of Hindu-Muslim identity in colonial India. The Orientalists and the colonial administrative decisions certainly played a part in defining the role of Muslims in India; but the denial of a shared past to Muslims and the definition of them as foreigners have a longer history. Moreover, the selective use of Orientalist ideas substantiates the claim that these attempts at defining identities were not just a reflection of the colonial or Orientalist discourse. It is instructive that these Indian authors chose to overlook a significant difference of opinion amongst Orientalists on the question of the impact of Muslim rule in India. They peddled only those opinions which described the influence of Muslim rule on India in deprecatory terms. In addition, they also ignored the big nineteenth-century shift in Orientalist tradition which Trautmann describes as a move away from 'British Indomania' towards 'Indophobia.'<sup>711</sup> Not surprisingly, these authors consciously discarded the turn taken by Mill and his followers and rather appropriated an earlier scholarly tradition which celebrated Indian civilization and ranked it favourably with Europe.

The foregoing analysis is suggestive of a complex process of construction and expressions of identity from which it is impossible to disentangle specific impact of railway experiences. But it needs to be underlined that those reading these travelogues and then going on journeys were being told what they were experiencing. In other words, these texts determined, at least to an extent, what people saw and also their reaction or interpretations. This aspect of travelogues brings them closer to the guidebooks than usually argued. Evidently, some of these ideas or interpretations were projected from other sources; but some

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<sup>710</sup> The notions of community based on regional or linguistic affiliations also had their roots in pre-colonial classifications. See, Kolff, 'Naukar'; Bayly, 'Origins' and P. Robb, *Sentiment and Self: Richard Blechynden's Calcutta diaries, 1791-1822* (New Delhi, 2011).

<sup>711</sup> Trautmann, 'Aryans'.

were produced anew from the direct experiences permitted by the railway. This ambiguity encapsulates the role of a new transport technology in defining the notions of identity and community. The railway brought people together in a manner hitherto unexperienced and these encounters played a crucial role in sharpening identities. Railways offered the most potent occasions for involuntary association and proximity which gave rise to ideas about identity, religion, and class. Following Lefebvre's ideas, it can be argued that railway engendered a new social space (railway space), produced through the conflicting interests of various social groups – a process which led to re-configuration of notions of identity. The importance of railways lay in the fact that in comparison with other sites (cities or factories), they were the most accessible to the most people. By providing sites for observations by quite large numbers, the railways, it can be argued, gave their experiences and interpretations greater force and salience. Moreover, these experiences were themselves deployed to re-assess notions of identity and community. These interpretations also points towards a contentious process of identity formation in colonial India which taken to its logical conclusion can hardly be defined as 'nationalistic', though these were certainly national (being made by Indians). A contemporary newspaper article perhaps came closest to appraising its impact when it noted that the demands for separate carriages for lower castes and Muslims posed a question about the claims of educated, patriotic Hindus to create nationalism in India.<sup>712</sup> If the ethnographic descriptions of the travelogues were not 'nationalistic', in that sense, then we must also re-assess the social impact of railway technology on colonial India.

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<sup>712</sup> Al-Bashir, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1903 in Selections of the Native Newspaper Report, NWP, L/R/5/80, OIOC.



## Chapter Eight

### *Conclusion*

This chapter is primarily a reflective exercise. One of the questions this thesis set out to explore was did the colonial belief in the transformative abilities of railways accord with realities in India? In other words, what was the impact of railways on colonial Indian society? Railways were expected to introduce the following changes: creating a perception of time and punctuality among Indians, integrating disparate regions of India into a national whole, dissolving social particularities including religious, caste and regional barriers and to form a collective national identity, and finally, transforming attitudes towards travel. These changes were claimed to have rescued Indians from centuries-old beliefs and practices which were impeding their economic and social progress. In short, railway-induced changes were to modernise India. The belief in the transformative ability of the railway was part of a wider mid-nineteenth century idea that technology could propel social change. This idea, as noted in chapter one, was shared by a number of contemporary Indians and has continued to be uncritically accepted. This thesis, therefore, also sought to respond on a wider and related issue of the ability of technology to transform society.

But what exactly did railways change? Further, what was the degree of the changes? In other words, was there a radical departure from past practices, or were there elements of continuity? It is important to identify the specificities to help appraise the exact influence of railways, disentangling it from other (indirect) modifications. A convenient way to underline railway-specific changes would be to critically examine those aspects which were claimed to have been transformed, namely, the perception of time, territorial imaginings, social behaviour and practices and attitudes to travel. The following paragraphs offer a thumb-nail sketch of these aspects and discuss whether or not the railways were successful in transforming them.

Railway time and timetables were argued to be the instruments which would introduce a sense of time among Indians. It was also expected to teach Indians punctuality. Hitherto this claim have been uncritically accepted and railway time and timetables have been identified as being instrumental in introducing time and travel discipline in India. But as chapter two demonstrated, the railway time was neither the earliest nor the only instrument through which a distinct, linear time-discipline was imposed on Indian society. Office and factory times also played important roles in creating time-discipline. Of these, office time was imposed much earlier than railway time, and it played a significant role in shaping

responses to railway time. This is evident in the ways in which office-goers petitioned the railway administration to offer more convenient train schedules and demanded the punctuality of trains. Further, the standardisation of 'railway time' was a gradual process; it was uniformly implemented only at the turn of the century (1905). This gradual development obviates the possibility of any sudden change. Also, different systems of time, for instance religious or agrarian, co-existed, before as well as after the railways. This multiplicity of time had implications for any standardised time-discipline because people travelled for different purposes. The impact of railway timetables on the daily commuters travelling to nearby cities for employment was sharper than, say, on pilgrims whose travel plans were also guided by 'religious time'. More importantly, the ability of 'railway time' to impact on behaviour was severely compromised by the routine unpunctuality of the trains. Hitherto arguments relating the railways to time have disregarded the constraints under which trains operated. At a practical level, railway companies struggled to adhere to the timetables. Their problems were increased by efforts to provide convenient timetables to suit passenger demands. But timetables were frequently altered which affected standardisation and travel discipline. On the other hand, interestingly, passengers were often critical of the unpunctuality of the trains, and complained about the inconvenience caused. This suggests that railways had a social and perceptual rather than a material impact on the management of time. The latter needed punctuality. In other words, railway timetables' actual impact on lives were limited, but the expectations in relation to train journeys were certainly important. The standardised clock was not reinforced so much by railway experiences as by its notional timetables.

The railway's impact on territorial imagination too was complex, even ambivalent, though it undoubtedly played a significant role in spatial integration of India. The railway network made the hugeness of India graspable. It offered a hitherto unimaginable possibility of moving from one part of the country to another with relative ease and speed. An important feature of imagining land was through ideas of distance and proximity. By compressing the time taken to travel from one place to another the railway annihilated the space between two locations. This annihilation however, was not real and only a product of feeling nearness as opposed to distance. It altered the relation between places when areas previously considered to be relatively far away were seen as nearby destinations. Places came to be classified on basis of re-evaluation of their relative distance. In other words, places closer to one's own region were argued to be more familiar (at least in theory) than those farther away. But, applying such assumptions after the railways, Baradakanta Sengupta, author of a Bengali travelogue, wrote less about northern India because the region he argued was not 'very

different' from Bengal. On the other hand, as we have seen in chapter six, railway experiences did not preclude the possibility of articulating notions of difference. On many occasions the difference with *swadesh* (in most cases Bengal) was underlined by specifying geographical and natural differences.

At a practical level, railways enabled rapid movement from one place to another. They also added a new layer of prominence to places which already possessed historical or religious significance, by including them in the railway network, and thereby making them more accessible. Further, as already noted, the guidebooks influenced the feelings, and experiences of seeing or visiting these places. All of this helped to conceptualise land as *desh* or *swadesh*, partly in the mind. This is not to argue that railways created these territorial conceptualisations. But it enhanced the possibility of experiencing them in a practical and specific manner. Not surprisingly, most authors of the travelogues acknowledged the role of railways in taking people away from *swadesh* or bringing them back with unprecedented rapidity. One of the earliest post-railway tracts by Akshay Kumar Dutt counted the quick return of travel-weary people back to *swadesh* as one of the many benefits associated with the railway.<sup>713</sup> Hinting at this inverse relation between distance and time, the author argued that poet Bharatchandra Ray's description of the hero of his epic *Bidyasundar* travelling from Burdwan to Kanchipuram in six days had once appeared as fantastic. But the invention of the railway made this a reality. Similarly, while narrating his experience of travelling from Calcutta to Jabalpur, Atulchandra Mitra wondered how within a day and half he had travelled far away from home, covering a distance of 616 miles from Calcutta.<sup>714</sup>

However, the territorial conceptualisations produced by railway travel experiences contest hitherto held assumptions that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the nation came to be imagined increasingly in standardised terms.<sup>715</sup> On the contrary, as chapter six showed, 'India' continued to be conceptualised in fractured way. In the first place, it was a land belonging to upper-caste Hindus. These imaginations were not just the products of 'colonial knowledge'. They were a curious mixture of new geographical sensibilities available through school and university curricula, combined with pre-colonial territorial conceptualisations, including religious and mythical sources. These conceptualisations, therefore, conformed with as well as contradicted the cartographic ideal of India created by the colonial state.

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<sup>713</sup> Dutt, 'Bashpiya.'

<sup>714</sup> A.C. Mitra, *Prabas Prasoon* (Purulia, 1911).

<sup>715</sup> S. Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the nation: mapping mother India* (Durham, 2010); Chatterjee, 'Discovering'.

Secondly, notions of the differences between places was another vital aspect of railway-induced territorial imagining. This was mainly articulated in material terms. As chapter six also showed, many contemporaries believed that the railway was singularly capable of altering the material fortunes of specific regions. But, as the examples of Mirzapur-Kanpur, and Patna-Champaran demonstrated, the role of the railway was more modest. Evidently, railways operated within a wider context, which influenced their ability to induce and sustain change. This also questions the ability of the colonial state to impose homogeneity, primarily by depriving localities of their specific identities, and thereby creating a 'national' space.<sup>716</sup> More importantly, it opens a possibility to question a well-established tradition in Indian historiography which argues that the railway created a differentiation of space by its presence or absence, which in turn determined the character and wellbeing of different places. Chapter six offered some preliminary ideas in this direction. Once more, what was thought was more important than what was experienced – and again that emphasised difference rather than unity.

Besides introducing a perception and value of time and territorial integration, the railway's most significant role was said to be its ability to transform social behaviour and practices and thereby dissolve social boundaries in India. It would not be an exaggeration to argue that this was the most publicised social and moral role of the railways in India. This robust belief in the putative ability of steam was possibly influenced by the fact that the railway promoters and colonial officials claimed that if Indians could let go their inhibitive social practices, then they would modernise, speedily and successfully. Further, it was hoped (and claimed) that the dissolution of social boundaries would create a common bond among Indians – forging their specific caste, religious or regional identities into a national one. In other words, it was expected that the experiment of putting people in an unfamiliar setting would make customs change and barriers fall. Not surprisingly, this possibility offered by railway encounters, especially railway travel, has also been celebrated by Indians, both contemporary commentators and later scholars. As noted in chapter one, a belief in this ability of railways has even outweighed their alleged role in subordinating India's economy and commerce to the interests of metropolitan Britain.

But, as the discussion in chapters three and seven showed, the reality was more complex. Contrary to previous assumptions, railways also had divisive impact on society. Evidently, railway experience did not rule the possibility of defining 'self' in more restrictive

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<sup>716</sup> Bury, 'Novel'; Goswami, 'Producing'; Sen, 'Empire'.

terms, based on social status, caste, religious and ethnic identities. As the demands for separate arrangements for food, drinking water, retiring facilities, and carriages illustrate, the conditions of railway travel strengthened social divisions. One cannot ignore the ways in which railways strengthened social divisions by offering new contexts, and indices of analysis. We have seen how the author of a Bengali travelogue did not allow Muslim passengers to enter the carriage in which he was travelling, because of what they ate.<sup>717</sup> Further, the demands for separate carriages based on ideas of caste, status or religious affiliation underline the crucial role of forced proximity engendered by railways in shaping notions of identity. This desire for separate arrangements hint at the ways in which the practices of railway travel led to re-configuration of existing notions of community. As chapters three and seven argued, the demands for separate carriages for lower castes and poor, conflated two distinct issues – caste and class. Though overlapping is not surprising, such demands were also based on ideas of ritual and social superiority which had origins in pre-colonial practices.

Besides sharpening caste, religious or class identities, railways also provided a forum and reinforcement for separating gender roles and identities, especially for higher-status women. Not surprisingly, the railway encounters did not create a new status for women, but rather a defence of their traditional roles and positions that ‘modernity’ might be expected to challenge. As chapter seven showed, the somewhat contradictory result from the campaigns to replicate the seclusion of ‘respectable’ women on trains and in railway stations was a perpetuation of the male attitudes which made protection and segregation necessary. It can readily be seen today that it failed to halt changes in the role and potential of many ‘modern’ Indian women that the railway pioneers might have predicted: but also that general attitudes are nonetheless far from transformed. It can be argued that the main reason for these paradoxical and mixed outcomes was that the real purpose of the special arrangements for women was the status of men. In other words, ‘respectable natives of rank’ continued to exercise their control over women’s mobility - both physical and social. This outcome also highlights the discrepancy between the purported and real impact of railways on Indian society.

The demands of railway travel necessitated physical proximity for several hours, and this provided occasions to encounter, and express notions of identity and community. Moreover, railways physically transported people to different places, away from the familiar,

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<sup>717</sup> Shastri, ‘Dakshinapath’.

which accentuated feelings of both similarity and difference. The sentiments generated by these experiences had social implications, as they were employed to reach wider conclusions. As chapter seven showed, the definition of ‘self’ and ‘other’ had two distinct levels: local or regional, and national. For instance, the authors of the travelogues defined themselves as Bengalis as opposed to Marathas, Rajputs or Biharis. At the same time, they also saw themselves as Indians, distinctly different from Europeans, but also as Hindus not Muslims. Further, Muslims were excluded from this pan-regional hierarchy. Rather they were defined as ‘outsiders’, who came as invaders, and failed to assimilate. This was repeatedly highlighted by classifying them with Europeans – as foreigners. As a result, Muslim achievements were undermined, and military victories were described as a loss of independence (by Hindus). More importantly, by this logic, Muslims were denied a part in the shared history and culture of India, and by extension a role in the nation’s future. Given this, contrary to what Aguiar has argued, it is not surprising that partition riots broke the ‘inviolability’ of railway space, because it was never as impervious to social norms and influences as has been imagined.<sup>718</sup>

At one level, however, railways did contribute to a sense of national identity.<sup>719</sup> As chapter seven argued, railway travel provided occasions to define ‘self’ in trans-regional language. Undoubtedly, railways, along with the postal service and printing press played a significant role in the creation of institutions and practices of Indian unity - social, economic and political. Speed on all counts mattered to standardisation, unity and oversight. An articulation of collective identity largely came as a response to railway travel experience, where railways were a tangible proof of the superiority of western knowledge, and by extension of white men. Not surprisingly, the operational and mechanical aspects of railways were primarily interpreted in social and political terms. Nowhere was this more evident than in the use of railways as a symbol, and as proof of the superiority of western technical knowledge. Contemporary travelogues are replete with references to railways symbolising western superiority. Though railway technology was genuinely appreciated, its success also prompted a process of introspection, particularly a search for the causes of India’s fall from civilisational glory. Broadly speaking, it was argued that India’s decline was due to Muslim rule, which corrupted Indian society and polity to the extent that it failed to repel European advances, and eventually accepted western dominance.

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<sup>718</sup> M. Aguiar, ‘Making modernity: inside the technological space of the railways’, *Cultural Critique*, 68, 2008.

<sup>719</sup> Chatterjee, ‘Discovering’.

Articulation of collective identity were also shaped by encountering Europeans either as co-travellers or as railway officials. Interestingly, such meetings were described as ‘pleasant’, and European railway officials were noted as ‘fair’, and, unlike their Indian counterparts, not inclined to demand bribes. It might be suggested that such representations reflect the perceptions of ‘colonial elites’, and therefore that they can be safely discounted. But these authors were aware of the political and racial dynamics of these interactions; and were certainly not eager to please Europeans or the railway administration. On several occasions they were critical of discriminatory policies of the railway companies, as well as the colonial government. We have seen how Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri criticised the salt laws or Kedarnath Das condemned the treatment of third-class passengers in unequivocal terms. Such behaviour and sentiments now appear contradictory or even conciliatory, possibly because our understanding of these events is teleological, that is, from the perspective of where things led: nationalism and binary opposition. Authors at the time were willing to report Europeans ‘friendly’ and Indians ‘corrupt’, without self-consciousness about how that made them seem as ‘nationalists’. Given this, it can be argued that expressions of identity and normative behaviour were not articulated only as binaries, in strict opposition with another. Rather there was a complex construction of notions of identity, because, while on one hand these observations admitted the presence of ‘corrupt Indian railway employees’ and ‘friendly European co-passengers’, on the other hand they did not discount the fundamental inequality of colonial relations. More importantly, these definitions question simplistic assumptions and claims that railways contributed to the creation of a uniform (homogenous), national identity.

This thesis has shown that railways were successful in transforming attitudes towards travel. The prospect of speedier, relatively safe and comfortable transport made travel into a pleasurable pursuit, primarily for people with means. But, more importantly, as the travelogues reveal, travelling was re-defined as ‘useful’, and prescribed as an effective means to regenerate India by familiarising people with India’s glorious past, physically transporting them to important historical sites. It was expected to trigger notions of solidarity, by bringing people from different parts of India in closer contacts. This transformation in attitudes towards travel was partly a product of the political climate of late nineteenth-century India. But, as chapter five demonstrated, it was also influenced by the literary and aesthetic sensibilities from European traditions, which were brought to India by the railway guidebooks and travel guides. They affected the ways travellers related to their surroundings and interpreted their experiences of meeting people, especially during railway journeys. They

therefore, also provided an index to compare people and places encountered on the journeys, the significance of which has been underlined in chapter four. The foregoing discussion suggests that the railway-induced changes were largely mixed, even ambivalent. This may be examined in the following aspects: *firstly*, the creation of a railway space – both physical and social; *secondly*, technology transfer in a colonial context, given the nature of the colonial state; and *finally*, the role of Indian agency. The subsequent paragraphs will analyse the impact of railways on colonial Indian society under these headings.

As outlined in chapter one, this thesis has been influenced by Lefebvre's idea that roads, railways and other forms of infrastructure are materialisations of social relations in space.<sup>720</sup> Further, social space is not created in a vacuum, but is produced and reproduced through conflict between various social groups. Social space, therefore, is also a means of control and hence of domination, of power. Railways engendered both physical and social space. Here, however, the focus will be on the latter. The railway's production of social space too did not occur in a void. More importantly, it provided a new, additional arena for various social groups to make claims, to contest, and mainly to dominate and exercise power – political, economic, social and ideological. This, I argue, circumscribed the efforts of the railway promoters and the colonial state to use the newly-created social space to their advantage (to initiate social change and to dominate), as other social groups (Indian) were doing similar things. In other words, railway space in colonial India came to be produced and re-produced through contestation between different interests and social groups.

Railways introduced new social spaces, and transformed the existing ones. The railway stations, the platforms, the carriages, the waiting rooms, and the *serais* and the *dharamsalas* were sites where a large number of people congregated, and interacted, perforce, as the demands of railway travel dictated. These sites therefore provided new occasions either to reinforce existing social practices, behaviours, norms and hierarchies, or to transform them. As the third chapter showed, the attitudes of Indian railway passengers to the arrangements made for food and water reflected both necessary adjustments (eating on platforms), and a refusal to adapt (not eating in the railway refreshment rooms). It also illustrated the manner in which railway experience was formative. For instance, the demand made by high-caste travellers to replace the cook at the railway refreshment room in Burdwan station indicates that the railway offered new contexts to articulate pre-existing norms and old hierarchies. Similar sentiments were demonstrated by Baboo Gopalram when he caustically

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<sup>720</sup> Lefebvre, 'The Production.'



remarked that the EIRC did not seem to care about Hindu passengers and employed only *bhistis*. Being used by many, the railways possibly gave more force and salience to such sentiments and demands, making them more effective.

The railway's role in providing new indices and sites to articulate identities is well illustrated in the demands for the introduction of intermediate class carriages. Here, the idea of social status was crystallised against a specific index (price of tickets), and related to what was received in return (comfort). But, more importantly, this example demonstrates the contestation of railway (social) space around the idea of social rank and respectability. As chapters three and seven demonstrated, travelling in upper-class carriages came to be interpreted as a mark of status, and by extension of the logic, those who travelled in the third or fourth class carriages could not claim either social status or respect. Such sentiments were amply evident in the petition sent by the 'respectable' middle-class office-goers to the EBRC on the question of the removal of seats from the third-class carriages. As the debate in chapter three showed, the issue came to revolve around an ability to pay more, which would procure better facilities and concomitant social status. The demands for separate carriages for travelling was not confined to ideas based on rank. As chapter seven showed, separate carriages were regularly demanded for upper-caste Hindus, in order to avoid contact with lower-castes and Muslims. In some cases separate arrangements were also wanted for Indians travelling in upper-class carriages. These demands certainly reflect the ways in which distinct social groups were articulating their group-specific identity, by demanding particular facilities. But, they also reflect that different social groups were contesting the social space engendered by railway by laying distinct claims over it. These claims, it can be argued, were the ways in which various social groups – Hindus, Muslims, upper-castes, or those possessing social rank, were trying to establish their dominance or attempting to exert their power over others. This process was further intensified by the fact that the demands of railway travel imposed certain standardised practices, introduced by the railway administration (also wishing to dominate and control), and that the diverse social groups therefore, had to negotiate with the railway travel practices as well as the railway managements to assert their claims. This is evident in the language and the demands of the petitions, which were written in a language of exclusion, emphasising group identity (respectable, middle-class).

The contestation over railway space is also obvious in the instance of crime against passengers primarily because crimes illustrate conflicts between diverse social groups, and their putative rights. As noted already, railways did not produce social space in a vacuum. The social space they created either overlapped or conflicted with pre-existing ones. And

crimes against passengers were a key indicator of these conflicting processes. As the fourth chapter showed, criminals knew that railways space could be violated and passenger security breached with impunity. For them, railways symbolised new sites, and opportunities to practise their trade. Not surprisingly, new railway-specific crimes and criminals subsisted on the system. Railway operations also re-defined crime, by bringing employee offences within its purview. These, too, had implications for the production and contestation of railway space. For instance, the ill-treatment of poor and illiterate passengers was widely condemned in the Indian-language newspaper reports. The language of these reports is instructive. It is evident that literate, urban, middle-class Indians, were assuming a specific social role. They claimed to represent those sections of society, who, arguably, did not have a voice of their own. The political implications are that such advocacy provided additional arenas for the rising middle-class to assert moral, social, and political claims vis-à-vis the colonial state. In other words, specific crimes against certain sections of railway travellers provided occasions to re-assess identities and also to claim dominance and power by asserting specific (representational) roles.

Crimes, either committed by professional criminals or railway employees, also affected passengers' perceptions of railways as a secure mode of transport. Railway travel came to be perceived as troublesome, even dangerous. Such sentiments had adverse effects on the railway's technology-driven prestige, and possibly reduced its attraction as a mode of transport. More importantly, here again, claims were made that reflect the conflict between various social groups who inhabited railway space. In this case, however, the contention was between Indians, as a collective, against the railway administration and the colonial state. Indian passengers used the incidence of crime to reach broader, political conclusions. They also claimed that the failure to ensure safe railway transit symbolised the inability of the colonial state to protect its subjects, and by extension questioned the legitimacy of the colonial rule. Through the incidence of crimes against passengers, Indian travellers belonging to the educated middle-class therefore laid a wider claim to control Indian politics as well as railway.

The conflict which marked the production and re-production of railway space is clearly evident in the contemporary travelogues. As noted in chapter one, travelogues were a fairly new literary medium, and used to express social, political or ideological claims. Further, being written in Indian languages, they were expected to carry the message to a wide audience. Before analysing this, it would be expedient to note that all travelogues did not express such sentiments. Broadly speaking, the Bengali texts went beyond mere descriptive

accounts of travel and conditions of travel more than their Hindi counterparts. In other words, the major difference between Bengali and Hindi travelogues lies in their content. The latter are primarily travelogues. Rarely does one come across anything but mundane detail about the trip or other sundry information. Only a few engage with wider contexts. These include Bharatendu Harishchandra, Har Devi and Ramshankar Vyas. Of these, Bharatendu's accounts were critical in tone, of railway administration and the colonial state.<sup>721</sup> Har Devi remarked on the superiority of Europeans, which she attributed to their political freedom.<sup>722</sup> Ramshankar Vyas provided a detailed panegyric account of Lord Curzon's Delhi Durbar.<sup>723</sup> The Bengali travelogues, on the other hand, are marked by a vigorous engagement with social and political issues. The authors expressed their views clearly, often strongly. Also, they linked their railway travel experiences to other events and interpreted them to reach wider conclusions. The difference, therefore, is striking. This can perhaps be explained by two factors: *one*, that travel writing was a novel venture in Hindi and, before Harishchandra, there was practically no template for this kind of personal report on travelling.<sup>724</sup> Further, as Vasudha Dalmia notes, travel writing in Hindi also slumbered for a number of decades after Harishchandra.<sup>725</sup> And *two*, this differential pattern in the contents of the travelogues can perhaps be explained by an uneven contact with the colonial state and its appendages. Bengalis, due to their early access to western education, became part of the colonial state; these texts therefore convey their efforts to explain the rise and growth of British power in India in a historical context. This is evident in the way in which in the early travelogues the British rule was identified as foreign, as a successor to the Muslims, but not necessarily colonial or imperial. The later travelogues became more political and even less ambivalent about the purported benefits of British rule. Given this, it can be argued, contrary to Kumkum Chatterjee, using Partha Chatterjee's idea of 'interior' and 'exterior', that these travelogues displayed a willingness and a conscious effort to engage with the colonial state in a recently-developed arena - railway journeys.<sup>726</sup> The implications of this difference between Bengali and Hindi travelogues are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it can be speculated that it may imply either an uneven regional response to the presence of railways, or a localised body of

<sup>721</sup> Harishchandra, 'Bharatendu Samagra'.

<sup>722</sup> Har Devi, *London Yatra* (Lahore, 1885).

<sup>723</sup> Vyas, 'Paribhraman'.

<sup>724</sup> Dalmia, 'Nationalization'.

<sup>725</sup> Idem.

<sup>726</sup> Chatterjee, 'Discovering', also see, P. Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse* (London, 1986).

political thought. Because of the differences the following discussion has to be based largely on the Bengali texts.

As chapter seven showed, the authors of the travelogues engaged in articulating notions of identity and community, re-assessing ideas of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Here, railways played a significant dual role. They took people away from familiar surroundings and social groups and also put different people together in hitherto unprecedented ways, offering occasions for interaction, comparison, and contemplation. Further, the experiences of railway travel – of meeting new people in new sites and under new circumstances and the ways in which such experiences were interpreted were influenced by the changing attitudes to travel, which were in turn shaped by the literary sensibility of railway guidebooks. More importantly, these experiences were analysed to reach wider conclusions, highlighting a process of conflict and contestation. The process is evident in the manner in which the authors of the Bengali travelogues claimed a superior status for Bengalis among other Indian groups by a unique process of self-representation. On one hand, this was certainly an attempt to contest the unflattering colonial stereotype of Bengalis as weak and effeminate, as also the self-critique that they were unenterprising. On the other, it was also a careful construction of ‘Bengali self’ as politically conscious and strident - superior to other social groups. We have seen that how several Bengali authors, such as Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri, Prasannamayee Devi, Surendranath Ray and Baradakanta Sengupta, constructed a claim for Bengalis to lead other Indians towards greater political and social accomplishments.<sup>727</sup> Here again, railway experience mattered. For instance, Durgacharan Ray interpreted the inability of a group of ‘Biharis’ to comprehend and conform to railway travel practices as symbolic of a wider problem which characterised them, namely their lack of western education and civilised behaviour. This he argued, also made them ‘unfit’ for greater political roles, implicitly hinting that ‘Biharis’ should be tutored towards civilisational progress by Bengalis.<sup>728</sup> Similarly, Deviprasanna Raychaudhuri claimed that Bengalis were the most appropriate candidate to lead Indians towards political independence because they (Bengalis) were educated and possessed the requisite talents.<sup>729</sup> Such sentiments are clearly suggestive of a process of conflict and contestation, a bid to exert power and control by one social group (Bengalis) over others, in and through the new social space engendered by railways.

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<sup>727</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Vivadha Darshan’, P. Devi, ‘Aryavarta’, Ray, ‘Uttar-Paschim’, Sengupta, ‘Bharat’.

<sup>728</sup> Ray, ‘Debganer’.

<sup>729</sup> Raychaudhuri, ‘Vivadha Darshan’.

The travelogues also reveal other comparable processes. For instance, one is struck by the ways in which the authors of the travelogues, who were mostly upper-caste Hindus, denied Muslims and lower-caste Hindus any claims to the railway space. As noted already, the demands for separate arrangements for travelling, food and water highlight this process. At one level, by refusing to share communal facilities, upper-caste Hindus were exerting their power over Muslims and the lower-castes. At another, this was an attempt to appropriate and manipulate the new social space and travel practices to their advantage. More importantly, this denial extended beyond railway space. We have seen how the territorial conceptualisation of *Aryavarta* meant a specific view of India's past, present and future, where Muslims and low-caste Hindus had no or little space. These contestations and claims, as Vasudha Dalmia has argued, possibly allowed for the articulation of an indigenous cultural and political identity designed in opposition to a repressive colonial power. But, as she also claims, while it was emancipatory (for upper-caste Hindus) it was repressive (for lower caste Hindus and Muslims). It excluded the latter with a potent imagining of their difference.<sup>730</sup>

A similar process of exerting dominance and conflict between various social groups over railway space is evident in the ways the right to represent the poor or those lacking social status was appropriated by the middle-class. The petitions against over-crowding, lack of toilets in the lower-class carriages, or ill-treatment by railway employees are suggestive of a process in which a rising middle-class in late nineteenth-century India was asserting a strident political and social position and even competing with the colonial state to speak for those who presumably lacked voice. But, at another level, there was also a process of refusing lower-classes any claims to railway space. This is evident in the language of newspaper reports which claimed separate, better travelling arrangements in the form of an intermediate class. It is interesting to note that 'respectable' middle-class 'native' passengers demanded physical sequestration. The newspaper reports are replete with appeals to the railway companies and the government demanding that lower-class people should not be allowed to enter (even by mistake) upper-class carriages or waiting rooms because they posed a threat of social degradation and a health hazard to their social superiors.<sup>731</sup> The process is perhaps best exemplified by Bharatendu Harishchandra's comment that the EIRC should use its decrepit carriages to carry people of the lower order (*neech shreni*).<sup>732</sup> It can thus be argued that

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<sup>730</sup> Dalmia, 'Nationalization'.

<sup>731</sup> See chapter three and seven.

<sup>732</sup> Harishchandra, 'Baidyanath'.

conflict and contestation over railway space added new dynamics to Indian social identities, especially to express the idea of material or political entitlement.

At one level, however, the contestation over railway space offered an opportunity to express a collective identity (Indians) as opposed to Europeans. As noted already, the railway experience – both in terms of symbolism and meeting Europeans or Eurasians was not necessarily unpleasant. But this did not rule out the possibility of conflicting social interests, especially because railway space was not created in a vacuum. Further, it is not difficult to see why railway space was the appropriate site to feel and express such sentiments. The railway was the physical symbol of superior technical knowledge possessed by Europeans, and their operation and management of it provided sufficient occasions for Indians to feel discriminated against. In other words, the production and re-production of railway space was marked by a process of conflict between Europeans and Indians, primarily over exert power and control. Though this process was uneven, as the Europeans possessed institutional power and enjoyed a monopoly of violence, nonetheless, their putative superiority was also contested by devaluing the materialist underpinnings of their achievements, and claiming a superiority for Indian civilisation, based on spiritual and religious attainments. Perhaps it was an attempt at what Johannes Fabian described as a ‘denial of co-evalness’ between colonisers and colonised.<sup>733</sup> By claiming civilisational glory, prior to the Europeans, Indians highlighted their superiority and thereby questioned the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise. Here again, therefore, railway-specific experiences were interpreted to reach wider conclusions. These contradictions and contestations can also be seen as a part of wider development in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which produced a critique of colonialism while at the same time implicitly or even explicitly accepting notions of western superiority.<sup>734</sup>

Evidently, the impact of the introduction of railways on Indian society was mediated by the production and re-production of railway space and the conflicts it engendered among diverse social groups vying to control this space. The process questions the claim that science, including technological developments, constituted a coherent strategy of power, through which colonialism exerted its cultural authority.<sup>735</sup> Though one cannot discount the fact that railways and other technologies were ‘tools of empire’<sup>736</sup>, their influence has possibly been exaggerated. On the basis of the foregoing discussion, one can safely argue

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<sup>733</sup> J. Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its objects* (New York, 1983).

<sup>734</sup> For similar trends, though not railway-induced, see, U. Makdisi, ‘Ottoman Orientalism’, *The American Historical Review*, 107, 3, 2002.

<sup>735</sup> G. Prakash, *Another Reason: science and the imagination of modern India* (New Jersey, Princeton, 1999).

<sup>736</sup> Headrick, ‘Tools’.

that, in the context of railways in colonial India, the social and cultural hegemony which the railway promoters wanted to impose was contested by Indians, sometimes as a collective, at other times as diverse social groups and interests. Further, this shows that the context of the transmission of technology is as important as the actual process, because it determines the ways in which technology would be diffused. Since in the case of India colonialism determined the introduction and transmission of railway technology, we can question how far the colonial context determined the impact of railways on Indian society? Did colonialism limit the ability of railways to bring change? Any attempt to answer these questions has to account for the nature of the colonial state in India. That subject already has a critical and sophisticated literature, my intervention is to re-assess the nature of the colonial state in India through railway-specific examples.

As the railway policies indicate, colonial rule was not a monolith. Evidently, railway policies, rules and practices lacked uniformity. As the foregoing chapters demonstrated, whether it was the question of introducing platform tickets, or separate carriages for Europeans and Indians, policies and, more importantly, practices were guided by local conditions and demands. The railway companies, as well as the government (at all levels), recognised the pragmatism of this arrangement, and did not want to introduce measures which would rankle with the locals, and affect railway revenue. This fluidity had partly to do with the peculiarities of railway management in India, which was a combination of public and private initiatives. Further, as noted in chapter one, till about 1905, when the Railway Board was created, railway policies were decided at several levels. As a result, the railway companies (both private and the state-owned) as well as the government formulated policies to suit their particular needs, especially to attract passengers. In other words, one can hardly speak of standardised railway policies to which all railways operating in India responded. This also shows our hitherto perceived image of a singular, uniform railway policy being imposed from above to be more a myth than reality.

Moreover, social change, so often assumed to be the central objective of colonial governance, was perhaps not as important as is assumed. The railway policies illustrate this well, particularly those related to the longer halts for Indian passengers, and the arrangements for food, drinking water, and toilets. At one level such measures were guided by a specific view of 'Indians' and their needs. But, it can be argued, they were also shaped by an ambivalent attitude towards introducing change in India. Some policies, particularly those imposed from above, were shaped by rhetoric that spoke in glowing terms about the changes railways would bring about. Rhetoric played an important role in the management of railways in India.

It was important because railways in India was also a moral and social mission, almost paternal in its beneficence, but one which demanded substantial investment. Given this, it can be argued that the rhetoric of improvement and progress was used to attract investment – of both men and material - to the railway cause. But the rhetorical comments and assertions routinely expressed by government documents and officials rather divert our attention from the ways in which railway operations differed in reality. Such rhetoric on the abilities of railways also influenced Indians, who believed in it. But, as chapters two and three illustrated, most of the policies designed and implemented at local levels were more prudent. They reacted to local demands. The colonial state, therefore, as seen through the prism of railway operations, appears to be incapable of imposing order or homogeneity.

This is not surprising, if one does not ignore (or forget) the material foundations of colonial rule, which certainly influenced the introduction of railways in India. Indian railways were the most expensive investment ever made by any colonial power in any colony.<sup>737</sup> As noted in chapter one, though initially railways operated in a guaranteed system, the search for ways to improve its profitability was never far from the minds of the Boards of Directors of the railway companies, as well as the colonial government. As Robert Varady's and Clive Dewey's work shows, profits from freight traffic grew slowly and were highly irregular until the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>738</sup> Given this, the passengers became the mainstay of railway income. Not surprisingly, therefore, responding to the demands made by Indian passengers became a matter of compulsion, especially because they constituted 97 per cent of the coaching traffic. This brings us to a crucial but oft-neglected aspect of railway operations in colonial India – the agency of Indian railway passengers. As noted in chapter one, hitherto it has been claimed that the railway policies were impervious to their needs and demands, and that this disregard for Indian passengers was a reflection of the unequal colonial relations among which railways operated in India. While one cannot deny that the unequal context of railway operations, at same time there is a need to re-assess the agency of Indian passengers. As the foregoing chapters demonstrated, railway policies responded to the demands of Indian passengers. This offers us an entry-point to appraise the contribution of Indian passengers to the impact of the introduction of railways upon Indian society.

As noted above, coaching traffic constituted the lion's share of railway revenue. Not surprisingly, Indian passengers were aware of their significance to the railway economy. As

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<sup>737</sup> Thorner, 'Investment'.

<sup>738</sup> Dewey, 'Steamboats'; R. Varady, 'Rail and Road Transport in Nineteenth Century Awadh: competition in a North Indian province', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Arizona, 1981).



the petitions and the newspaper reports quoted in the chapters two and three showed, Indian railway passengers sought to use this leverage to secure modifications in policies and practices which they found unsuitable. These appeals were invariably framed by an argument that, since the railway administration earned most of its revenue from the Indian passengers, they therefore, deserved better facilities and provisions. Interestingly, many of their demands, were met. We have seen how timetables and train schedules were frequently altered to suit the demands of 'native' passengers. Similarly, changes were made in the food and drinking water arrangements to suit 'native' demands and sensibilities. Such responses were certainly dictated by pecuniary interests. The correspondence of the railway companies with their respective Boards of Directors and the government of India reveal that fulfilling the demands of Indian passengers was more a matter of compulsion than of choice. There was therefore a process of interaction and negotiation between Indian passengers and the railway authorities. The railway companies were in need of steady 'native' passenger traffic, and for Indians the railway offered speedier, and relatively comfortable transit. This process, though asymmetrical, was based on an awareness of mutual dependence.

A new situation (the railway carriage) gave rise to new expectations about standards (berths, lights, and toilets in carriages). At times, passengers were conservative in their attitudes, but mostly they soon adapted, and their demands indicate their changing expectations. The outcome in different cases depended on commercial calculations, as chapter three illustrated, whether over seating arrangements, lighting or toilets. The same is true of pressures for improvements in facilities at the stations. For Indians, two related commercial arguments consistently appear: that services or facilities should be commensurate with the price of the tickets; and that lower class passengers could be given inferior facilities because they paid less. As noted earlier, Bharatendu's suggested that the EIRC use its decrepit second class carriages for transporting third class passengers; and petitioners demanded seats in carriages because of the higher cost of their tickets - all this pointed towards differential treatment based on the ability to pay. For the railways, similarly commercial reasoning is shown by the fact that a substantial amount of official correspondence described Indian passengers as 'customers'. As chapter three argued, even if one is inclined to explain the usage as purely rhetorical, the choice of word brings out the dynamic interaction between Indian passengers and the railway managements. However, it is instructive that Indian railway passengers realised their potential and demanded services not on the basis of racial equality, but on economic grounds.

On the other hand, as noted already, not all demands of Indian passengers were fulfilled. This could possibly be explained by the fact that the negotiation with Indian passengers was framed within a colonial context; and, that therefore, though marked by commercial and equitable reasoning, it was also unequal. Some demands were met as said, and others like the arrangements for food and drinking water were conceded even before they were made; but some, like a remedy for over-crowding in the carriages, were never redressed. The demands for toilets in carriages took decades to be implemented. The difference can perhaps be explained by two factors: *one*, the capital outlay involved in fulfilling specific demands; and *two*, the status of those who made the demand. As we have seen, the expense involved in putting oil lamps in carriages was negligible, and the demand was thus fulfilled. Introducing toilets in lower class carriages involved either acquiring new or modifying existing rolling stock, and the companies were not willing to spend the amount involved. Further, demands from ‘respectable natives’ were met more readily than those from others. On occasions, their displeasure or disapproval was feared, and steps were taken to address specific issues which might have rankled with them. We have seen in chapter four how a proposal to detain every passenger who had over-riden, in order to catch railway thieves, was turned down by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, as he feared that this step would affect the social prestige of the ‘respectable natives’, and would consequently affect railway revenue. Given such sentiments, it was no coincidence that reserved carriages for women were initially introduced in the upper class, while the introduction of similar measures was delayed for third-class passengers. Or that the debate around providing toilets in the intermediate-class carriages was never about the need for the facility for reasons of health, but rather about what was demanded by the middle-class, ‘respectable’ patrons of these carriages as its absence was interpreted as an affront to their social rank and gentility.

It is instructive to note that the authors of the travelogues recorded instances of ill-treatment of passengers by railway employees merely as witnesses.<sup>739</sup> The co-relation between social status and treatment of passengers comes out well in the Hindi play *Rel-ka-Vikat-Khel*.<sup>740</sup> Here, the main protagonist, a poor villager, was forced to bribe the railway police constable who in collusion with the ticket clerks had made it difficult for passengers to buy tickets. In addition, the constable also beat the villager. Finally, ill-treated and assaulted, the hapless peasant declared in desperation *yeh toh sab lutere hi dikhte hain* (all these people

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<sup>739</sup> Though the authors record few instances of bribes being demanded; they never experienced any ill-treatment.

<sup>740</sup> *Rel-ka-vikat-khel*

appear to be thieves). The fulfilment of demands based on the articulation of social status plus the ill-treatment of poor and illiterate passengers, underlines the role of rank or social status in shaping colonial policies, perhaps as much as notions of racial difference. It also certainly adds to our understanding of the dynamics of railway operations in colonial India, by highlighting that the ill-treatment of Indian railway passengers was not merely an expression of racial prejudice, but a social behaviour, partly based on indigenous practices, in which Indian railway employees participated as much as Europeans and Eurasians.

Evidently, Indian passenger responses and the agency exerted by them mitigated the impact of railways on Indian society. Here, it needs to be underlined that this was made possible by a specific view of India and Indian society which the colonial state, and by extension, the railway administration believed. According to this view, *firstly*, caste and religious identities were at the centre of social formation in India, and *secondly*, Indian society was hierarchical, and therefore, ‘respectable’ Indians should be assuaged, as they could take care of the rest of the population. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to answer whether or not these ideas were true. But it is relevant to note that such ideas were not merely imagined or a creation of the colonial state, but had some basis in Indian realities.<sup>741</sup> More importantly, for the purposes of this project, the use of social customs and practices, in search of limited benefits, by Indian passengers, the colonial state and the railway companies, contests hitherto- made claims about the railways’ impact on Indian society, which brings us to the point of assessing the ability of technology to propel social change.

As noted in chapter one, a belief in the beneficence of steam was not restricted to its nineteenth-century admirers and promoters. Post-colonial historians too celebrated it. Railway travel was expected to change customs and dissolve social barriers, even to help make a new India, with a common language and practices, mainly by the experience of putting people in an unfamiliar setting. But as the chapters demonstrated, the impact of railway operations on the issues of identity was quite opposite. Railway travel as mediated through the new sites modified existing structures of Indian society and added new dimensions. It sharpened the existing ideas of social rank and respectability. Travelling in upper-class railway carriages was as much a mark of social standing, as of a more comfortable journey. As argued in chapter two, three and seven, the collective experience of railway travel, subdivided by class, gender and community reinforced collective identities

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<sup>741</sup> Bayly, ‘Origins’, Van der Veer, ‘Religious’, Ray, ‘The Felt’, and Kolff, ‘Nauker’.

(class, gender, being Indian). There was also link between the collective experiences, through collective protests, to a reinforcement of the group when its demands were met. But, any consequential change was limited because accommodation to the existing mores had to be made. To this must be added Indian agency and other factors: *firstly*, the practical shortcomings - with unpunctual trains, inconvenient timetables and so on; and *secondly*, the confusion of the message – how unifying could a system be, which ensured that it was made of different experiences for different classes, communities, and genders?

Evidently, in the Indian context, the railway influence was both considerable and selective, forcing us to re-think the neutrality of technology. In other words, how far could technology, independent of other variables, initiate social changes? An answer to this question depends on how change is defined. At one level, change implies direction, and by definition could go either forward or backward. But, in the case of railways in India, forward movement has been uncritically assumed. Surprisingly despite questioning the linearity of historical progress (as defined in the Enlightenment traditions), and the singularity of modernity (in both chronological and spatial aspects), historians have applied both these indices to appraise the role of railways. The nature of modernity in India has already received extensive and critical scholarly attention. My question was whether railways – a ubiquitous symbol of modernity - succeeded in modernising colonial Indian society? Did the expectations and imaginings of the railway promoters match with the realities? Any attempt to answer these questions depends on how one defines modernity. At the risk of simplification, if modernity is defined as societal standardisation conducive to the socio-economic mobility of people, commodities and ideas, then railways in India delivered an ambivalent modernity – one which standardised, but also let old forms and particularities persist. This, as the foregoing discussion suggests, can perhaps be explained by the colonial context in which railway technology was transmitted to India and the peculiarities of Indian society. On the other hand, this railway-borne ambivalent modernity had significant implications for colonial Indian society. Further, it can be argued that the peculiarities of the diffusion of railway technology have even shaped the socio-political and economic lineaments of post-colonial India.

In a popular song from an old Hindi movie *Jagriti* (awakening), a school teacher travels with a group of students, introducing them to ‘glimpses of India’.<sup>742</sup> The song suggests a significant continuity in the conceptualising of India and Indians almost a decade

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<sup>742</sup> Kavi Pradeep, ‘Aao bachhon tumhe....’ (*Jagriti*, 1954).

after independence. Moreover, the mode of transport chosen to achieve this ‘awakening’ was the railway, which underlines its role in shaping these imaginations. The song defines India as a sacred land – bound by the Himalayas on the north and the sea on the south, and washed by the sacred waters of the Ganges and the Yamuna. But, while offering said details of the spatial dimensions of the nation, the song mentions only Rajputana, Maharashtra, Punjab and Bengal. It goes on to celebrate these regions’ spirit of independence as encapsulated in the sacrifices made by patriots, which include: Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, and Subhas Chandra Bose. Evidently, it construes two enemies, the Muslim rulers, and the colonial state, as illustrated in the ways in which traditions of resistance were valorised in the regions noted above. The first two are praised for their resistance to the Muslim ‘aggression’, and the last two for their opposition to the British rule. While it can be argued that, written in the aftermath of independence and partition, the song reflects the mood of the hour; it needs to be underlined that the sentiments expressed and the conceptualisation envisaged were not products of the immediate past. On the contrary, as chapters six and seven showed, such sentiments were indicative of longer traditions of conceptualising territory and community (who belongs to the nation) which competed with and continue to contest notions of a homogenised ‘national’ space and identity.

This thesis claims an ambivalent and limited role for railways in inducing social change in colonial India. It does not deny that changes occurred, but questions their range, nature, direction, and implications. More importantly, it demonstrates the participation of Indians in creating and directing this change, implying in turn that the outcome influenced Indian society in more ways than has been thought. The foregoing analysis suggests that railways had unintended consequences for India, assuming that other results were intended. In other words, this project also questions the belief that technology can propel social change, regardless of the social context.

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